THE BOYS

by

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Based on the comic book
created by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson

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DARKNESS

The high-pitched whine of jet engines. A VOICE.

VOICE (V.O.)
We were on patrol over Bayonne...

EXT. SKIES OVER NEW JERSEY - DAY

A team of four SUPERHEROES streaks in formation though the cloud-filled sky. We fly around and through them, catching sight of each one in their magnificent, superhuman grace:

The crew-cut, caped THUNDERBOLT. The insect-like SWATTO. The colorful and robotic MIND-DROID. Finally--

The man whose voice we're hearing. He wears a high-tech suit of blue metallic armor and flies with the aid of a winged jet pack. This is the TEK KNIGHT. The sun glints off his faceplate as he cruises over the sprawling port of Bayonne.

TEK KNIGHT (V.O.)
We'd gotten a tip that Final Fate was smuggling a mutant army in through the port. Thunderbolt, Swatto, Mind-Droid, and I were on aerial recon while the rest of the team went in on foot.

TEK KNIGHT'S POV: a digital heads-up display augments the view through his visor. A constantly-updated series of alerts (airspeed, altitude, radar) stream past on either side.

TEK KNIGHT (V.O.)
Of course, like most of these things, it was a false alarm. We were wasting our time up there.

Thunderbolt shakes his head, motions for them to break off.

TEK KNIGHT (V.O.)
But just as we were about to turn for home, a thought occurred to me. Like the Siren's call, something strong and simple and undeniable.

Flying above and behind Mind-Droid, Tek Knight looks down upon the backside of his teammate.

TEK KNIGHT (V.O.)
Mind-Droid has a great ass.

TEK KNIGHT'S POV: ZOOMING IN on Mind-Droid's sculpted buttocks. Sensors scan it up and down. Data scrolls past.

TEK KNIGHT
Just like that. Like, *the sky is blue*. Or, *I like cheeseburgers. Mind-Droid has a taut, magnificent ass.*
(pause)
The clarity of it was startling, invigorating. But then, another thought came...

Slowly he's closing in on the unsuspecting Mind Droid. His labored breathing can be heard. WARNINGS FLASH on his display: *PROXIMITY ALERT... PROXIMITY ALERT...*

TEK KNIGHT (V.O.)
What if I just... it would feel so good to just...

PROXIMITY ALERT... Relief tube deployed...

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The Tek Knight, in full armor, sits on the couch in a quiet Manhattan psychiatrist's office. Across from him is the composed, sweater-vested DR. MOSS.

DR. MOSS
So, Tek Knight, how would you define the problem?

Tek Knight looks up, his voice trembling with frustration.

TEK KNIGHT
I can't stop screwing things!

DR. MOSS
You must have feelings about that.

TEK KNIGHT
Apparently I have feelings about almost anything. A side of beef. A hole in the wall of my hideout. A watermelon. For God's sake, I nailed one of my team members in mid-flight. Thank Christ we were at altitude.

DR. MOSS
Do you identify as gay?

TEK KNIGHT
Gay? He's a telepathic robot. And the tail pipe of the Tek-Mobile? You tell me what sex that is.

Dr. Moss clears his throat.

DR. MOSS
And these desires of yours, are they causing problems at work?

TEK KNIGHT
Well I was suspended, of course. No surprise there.
(pause)
But, more importantly, I had been interviewing with the Seven for an open spot on the team.

DR. MOSS
The Seven.

TEK KNIGHT
Yes. The Seven. The most powerful superhero team in the goddam world.

Dr. Moss shrugs. Tek Knights stands, points to the window.

TEK KNIGHT
Their fortress hovers above the city!

DR. MOSS
I don't really follow superheroes.

TEK KNIGHT
Jesus Christ...
(shaking his head)
Whatever. Let's just say that when they heard about... my problem... they moved on.

DR. MOSS
And the loss of this opportunity, this exclusion from the Seven. That must have been a disappointment.

TEK KNIGHT
Yes. That was a disappointment.

Tek Knight turns toward the window, gazing up to where the Seven's HOVERFORT floats in the sky above Manhattan. Tiny caped figures can be seen flying toward it.

TEK KNIGHT
A major disappointment.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN MANHATTAN - SAME

A hard-looking, dark-haired man in his thirties gets lunch at a falafel stand. He wears the calm, dark smile of a man who isn't afraid of anyone. This is BUTCHER.

Above, THE CAPED FIGURES ROCKET toward the hovering HQ, rattling windows. One peels off, floating for a moment over the city, A RED-WHITE-AND-BLUE FIGURE of benevolence and power. He is...

VOICES IN THE CROWD
Homelander!

People on the street cheer... but not Butcher. He stares up at the Homelander with deep malevolence.

BUTCHER
I'll have you, you bastard.

Butcher looks down at the big slobbering BULLDOG at his feet.

BUTCHER
Off we go, Terror. We're late.

EXT. CARNIVAL - GLASGOW, SCOTLAND - DAY

A Ferris Wheel rotates slowly across a dark, cloudy sky. We DESCEND onto a travelling carnival set up outside the city.

HUGHIE (20's) walks with his girlfriend ROBIN among the colorful booths. On the smallish side, he has close-cropped hair and bright, curious eyes. He speaks with the energy and enthusiasm of a huge fan, no matter what the subject.

HUGHIE
...you put John Barleycorn at striker, Teen Tartans in the midfield, and Tam O' Shanter on defense. But no costumes. No one knows except the coaches. We'd never lose again.

Robin is bookish, hip, comfortable in her own skin. She can't help but laugh.

ROBIN
And who's in goal? The Highlander?

HUGHIE
Jings, with that lineup, you could stand a bottle of whiskey in goal. It'd still be a shutout every time.

Robin shakes her head, smiling, clearly smitten.

HUGHIE
I'm serious. Every World Cup, ours. Who's going to beat us? Argentina? Don't have to worry about the U.S. putting the Seven in... Americans hate soccer!

ROBIN
I love you, Hughie. You must be the only person in Scotland who still says "jings."

Hughie stops in his tracks, looks at Robin.

HUGHIE
What did you say?

ROBIN
I said, you must be the only...

HUGHIE
No, no. Back it up more.

ROBIN
You know what I said.

Robin cocks her head, gives a sly smile.

ROBIN
Is it too soon? Am I going to scare you off?

The look on Hughie's face says she has nothing to worry about. He pulls her close.

ROBIN
I knew after a week, Hughie.

HUGHIE
You're not gonna scare me off.

A long kiss that shuts out the rest of the world. When they finally break, Hughie holds her out at arm's length, a wide smile, staring at her in amazement.

HUGHIE
Robin...

Suddenly-- A BLUR. A COSTUMED FIGURE TUMBLES THROUGH FRAME, CRASHING INTO ROBIN. The impact RIPS HER FROM HUGHIE...

...and SLAMS HER INTO A BRICK WALL 200 feet away.

HUGHIE
Robin?!

Another BLUR, running at superhuman speed: THE A-TRAIN.

A-TRAIN
Out of the way!

The A-Train dashes by the stunned Hughie, stopping on a dime in front of the wall where his wolf-like foe lies dead.

Young, blonde and frat-boy cocky, the A-Train's costume sports a big "A" across the chest. Psyched with himself, he pumps his fist a few times, mimicking a train whistle.

A-TRAIN
Whooooooooooo!! Whooooooooo!!
(to the crowd)
You see that shit?! Must've thrown him 300 yards!!! Boo ya!!!

Rushing to the scene, the cops and paramedics are much more concerned with Robin, who lies twisted and broken in a pile of bricks. There is no question she's dead.

Hughie, in shock, stares at Robin. He's silent, trembling, as a medic tentatively approaches. A bit away, A-Train is oblivious, trying to chat up a pair of cops as he stretches.

A-TRAIN
Scanned Wolfen heading south at Mach 3. Had to compute a pursuit curve while I was sprinting flat-out across the Atlantic.
(nods)
Walkin' on the water, bro. They never see it comin'.

He motions for a high-five. None comes. He looks around.

A-TRAIN
Where am I, Ireland?

POLICEMAN #1
Scotland. Glasgow.

The cop's palpable disdain is lost on A-Train.

A-TRAIN
Sweet. I guess I better...

He is interrupted by a CRY OF RAGE AND GRIEF. It's Hughie, who struggles against the medics who try to sedate him. He tries to claw his way toward A-Train, to attack him, but can't get free. A-Train winces, turning back toward the cops.

A-TRAIN
You, uh... got people who take of this, right?

HUGHIE (O.S.)
NOOOOO!!!!!

The cop just stares, gives a tight nod.

A-TRAIN
Cool. 'Cause I gotta jump.

And like that, A-Train BOLTS TOWARD THE HORIZON at supersonic speed, calling out his signature catch-phrase:

A-TRAIN
CAN'T STOP THE A-TRAIN!!

As he disappears, we find Hughie, desperate and inconsolable.

HUGHIE
ROBIN!!!!

Hughie struggles to free himself, to go to Robin, as if he might help. On his anguished cry, we CUT TO:

EXT. MIDTOWN MANHATTAN - DAY

A nondescript three-story office building. Only the cameras flanking the door hint of something interesting inside.

ASSISTANT (O.S.)
Ms. Rayner. A Mr. Butcher is here to see you.

INT. DIRECTOR RAYNER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

SUSAN RAYNER (40's), sharp in both manner and dress, is the CIA's director of special operations. She looks up as Butcher enters.

BUTCHER
I'm disappointed, Sue. You don't look so happy to see me.

RAYNER
I wouldn't have called you if I had another option. But unfortunately, I do require your services.

BUTCHER
Sure, luv. Just bend over and focus on the stapler...

RAYNER
You're disgusting.

BUTCHER
(a smile)
Missed you, too. About that "top secret" directive you're supposed to brief me on...

RAYNER
You don't know what's in that directive.

BUTCHER
The president is worried about the superhumans. Specifically the Seven. Wants them kept in line. And I'm the only one who knows the skeletons in their closets.

RAYNER
You mean The Legend knows.

BUTCHER
Legend only talks to me.

Rayner shakes her head, conceding the point.

BUTCHER
President is smart to worry. Superpowers are a dangerous thing. If you can dodge bullets or fly through the sun, sooner or later you might wise up and realize that what you're really invulnerable to is your *humanity*. Then... God help us.

RAYNER
The Seven got real comfortable over the last eight years. They practically lived in the Oval Office. New president wants to end that. He'd like to try running the country by himself.

Butcher swipes a framed photo off her desk. It's of the new PRESIDENT, DANIEL CLEVELAND. Late forties, biracial, fit, the picture of modern optimism.

BUTCHER
The Seven won't like that. Neither will Vought American.

RAYNER
(nodding)
They won't go quietly. We think they're planning something big. So the job is gathering intel...

BUTCHER
The job is gathering <u>dirt</u>. You want shit you can use against them... because they're too damn popular and powerful for you *civil servants* to touch.
(pause)
You want someone who can remind them who's boss... and if need be, kill a few of these assholes.

Butcher smiles, milking it.

BUTCHER
You need the Boys.

Rayner produces a thick file from a drawer: indeed, it's labelled "The Boys." It hits the desk with a thud.

RAYNER
Where are the rest of them?

<u>The audio of the scene continues over IMAGES</u>:

A LANKY STUBBLE-FACED MAN sits in a cafe window nursing an espresso. He wears a long black trenchcoat, and a pair of old leather goggles rest on his forehead. He mumbles contentedly to himself as he works on a CROSSWORD PUZZLE.

BUTCHER (V.O.)
Frenchman's probably sipping an espresso somewhere and babbling like a madman... doubt he's found much of an outlet for his talent...

SUPER: ***THE FRENCHMAN***

Over his shoulder, we see the Frenchman's solution to the puzzle-- it's an insane jumble of numbers, letters, and stick figures, sometimes two or three to a square.

BUTCHER (V.O.)
Heard the Female's doing contracts for the mob again. Can't really help herself... idle hands...

ANOTHER IMAGE: at the door of a CRAPPY HOUSE is a short Japanese woman (20's). She wears all black, her unkempt hair obscuring much of her face. But we can see her eyes-- they look baleful and haunted. She knocks and waits patiently.

SUPER: ***THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES***

The door opens, revealing a BELLIGERENT-LOOKING ASSHOLE. He smirks and calls out over his shoulder.

BELLIGERENT ASSHOLE
It's just some girl.

As he turns back to her, he SCREAMS IN TERROR...

BACK IN RAYNER'S OFFICE

Rayner shakes her head as she leafs through the file.

BUTCHER
And Mother's Milk may take a little convincing.

RAYNER
Same deal as last time. We fund you, but you can never be traced to us. We maintain deniability at all times, for obvious reasons. You're completely off the record. Hopefully it won't all go to shit like it did the last time.

Silence. Butcher refuses to bite.

RAYNER
Put the fear of god into 'em. You're our deterrence. Show the Seven how ugly this can get if they make a move. And if you find out what that move is, the information comes directly to me. Understood?

BUTCHER
(a crude smile)
Be glad to deliver it personally.

RAYNER
Ugh. You'll be replacing Mallory, I assume... or what's left of him.

BUTCHER
I have some ideas.

Off the sound someone KNOCKING ON A DOOR, we CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The door of an apartment opens to reveal Hughie, his eyes ringed in red, staring blankly out at unseen visitors.

VOICE (O.S.)
Mister Hugh Campbell?

INT. HUGHIE'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Hughie sits on the bed among a litter of beer cans. Before him stand THREE SUITED MEN, trying their best to project respectful sympathy. An odd silence. Finally--

SUITED MAN
I'm so sorry for your loss.

SUIT #2
There's nothing good to say.

SUIT #3
Our deepest condolences.

Hughie just stares up at them, both drunk and in shock. He clutches a woman's sweater. He can barely speak.

HUGHIE
Who are you?

One of the men smiles. As he attempts to answer, we <u>see things through HUGHIE's POV</u>: *it's an impressionistic haze of false smiles and subtle glances. The suits' words mingle and overlap, slowing increasing in menace.*

THREE SUITS
... courtesy visit to keep you in the loop... events like these have ramifications... terrible... sadly might see this tragedy as an opportunity... brings us to the legal question... compensation... a very tricky matter... you weren't actually married to her... very tricky... if you were to agree not to pursue legal action, we could reciprocate... you resisted medical attention, no... paramedic with a black eye... possible retinal damage... complicated situation...

Seemingly from nowhere, a dense LEGAL DOCUMENT is produced... a pen, conveniently uncapped.

THREE SUITS
...last thing we want to do is rush you... shock you've suffered... really for your own protection.

Suddenly the pen is SNATCHED UP, and we're SNAPPED BACK INTO NORMAL POV as Hughie quickly and angrily signs. He glares at the men through rage-filled eyes. Something has snapped.

HUGHIE
I don't want *compensation*.

The men smile, taking the document. They mumble a few more platitudes as they exit. As the door closes behind them--

HUGHIE
I want her back.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - IOWA

Near the edge of a corn field, a large tree has collapsed into some high-tension wires and caught fire. Amid the crackling sparks and building flames... a tiny voice. A meow.

There's a cat up there.

BELOW, a crowd has gathered. A distraught WOMAN implores a group of puzzled-looking FIREFIGHTERS.

WOMAN
Do something, won't you?!

FIREMAN
I'm sorry, ma'am. It's too dangerous to send someone up there until they cut the power.

Her husband tries to console her. Then-- a RUSH OF WIND, a BURST OF COLOR streaking across the sky. Help has arrived.

CHILD
The Young Americans!

Clean cut, apple-pie wholesome, the YOUNG AMERICANS are a born-again supergroup.

Their leader, the tousle-haired DRUMMER BOY, springs into action, easily righting the tree. Meanwhile, the blonde, demure STARLIGHT flies up through the flames and gently takes the cat in her arms.

STARLIGHT
I've got you.

She descends, white and gold cape shimmering, the most radiant girl-next-door you can imagine.

The gathered townspeople cheer excitedly. Drummer Boy points insistently toward the heavens.

DRUMMER BOY
In His name! In His name!

Starlight hands the kitten to the woman's young DAUGHTER.

WOMAN
Thank you, Starlight.

DRUMMER BOY
Y.A., bring it in!

The team circles up, joining hands. Starlight looks to Drummer Boy. They share a coy, loving smile before bowing their heads in prayer.

DRUMMER BOY
Starlight?

STARLIGHT
Lord Jesus, thank you for blessing us with these powers. Thank you for lighting our way in this crisis and for guiding our hands...

Suddenly, a DARK PRESENCE looms behind them. The group turns, startled to see: a figure clad head to toe in form-fitting black. Even his face is obscured. We'll come to know him as...

STARLIGHT
Black Noir...

Silently, he produces a envelope and hands it to Starlight... and then disappears in a wisp of black smoke. HOLY ROLLER, another member of the team, prods Starlight.

HOLY ROLLER
Well? Open it.

Starlight opens the envelope. Shocked by what she sees, she can barely get the words out.

STARLIGHT
I've... been chosen to join The Seven.

Tears form in her eyes. The group eagerly congratulates her, hugging her, talking of "the big leagues."

ON DRUMMER BOY: forcing a smile.

DRUMMER BOY
What a blessing.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PARK - GLASGOW - EVENING

CLOSE ON: a tiny SHITZU, yapping its little heart out. PULL BACK to see that it's being walked by an OLD WOMAN.

They pass by Hughie, sitting on a bench, staring out across the park, his eyes bloodshot. Fists balled, he is brimming with frustration and anger that has no place to go.

All around him are signs of vibrancy and life. Couples hold hands. Friends play soccer. The happy dog keeps YAPPING.

It's too much. Hughie shakes his head, stares at the ground.

HUGHIE
It was all going right... for once
it was going right...

More shrill BARKING. Hughie looks fit to claw his hair out.

HUGHIE
Someone shut that damn dog up!

BUTCHER (O.S.)
You want to see something funny?

Hughie looks up to see a man he doesn't know sitting next to him. It's Butcher. Terror (the bulldog) is at his feet.

BUTCHER
Terror.
(pointing to the shitzu)
Mount up!

Terror gives a happy yelp and rushes toward the shitzu, unceremoniously mounting the dog and pumping away. The old woman is horrified. Hughie can't help but let out a laugh.

HUGHIE
That's insane.

BUTCHER
You looked like you needed a laugh.

Hughie considers the man next to him.

BUTCHER
I'm not going to mess with you, Hughie. I know what happened to you. That's why I'm here.
(extending his hand)
Name's Butcher. Billy, if you like.

HUGHIE
Hughie. Sometimes Wee Hughie. But you already know that, huh?

BUTCHER
Not the Wee part.
(calling Terror)
Finish up, boy, we're walking!

Terror dismounts the devastated shitzu. He joins Hughie and Butcher as they stand up. They walk in silence for a long moment. Then...

BUTCHER
I'm sorry about what happened to your girl. It's unforgivable. And that bullshit they made you sign... makes my blood boil.

HUGHIE
How do you know all of this?

BUTCHER
I used to run a team whose job was stopping the sort of shit that happened to Robin. Or if we *couldn't* stop it, we made sure the guilty party was in no condition to do it again.
(looks right at him)
It was our job to keep an eye on *them.*

HUGHIE
Superheroes.

BUTCHER
That's right. Supes. The long underwear brigade... treatin' the world like it's their playground.

A pause. It's obvious Butcher's words are landing.

BUTCHER
Anyway, it looks like our time's come around again. I'm trying to put the team back together.

HUGHIE
Who do you work for?

BUTCHER
C.I.A.

HUGHIE
Aren't they a bunch of assholes?

BUTCHER
What are my other options? Use some billion dollar inheritance and operate out of a cave?

Hughie shrugs.

BUTCHER
All I've got is a team of pissed off guys who have been through something like you have. Whose eyes got opened. The kind of good we do requires money. I ain't picky where it comes from.

HUGHIE
So, what is this? You want me to be part of this... team?

BUTCHER
I'll tell you what I want. Someone who's felt it. The arrogance. The disdain they have for us and our worthless little lives. Someone who's willing to do something about it.

HUGHIE
Why me? I'm just a regular person.

BUTCHER
Oh, you feel like a *regular person*, do you? I read the report those wankers filed. I know you didn't ask for money. Almost everyone does, but *you* didn't want a payoff, so you could live your life pretending some git didn't get away with killing your girlfriend.
(pause)
That's not what you wanted at all.

HUGHIE
No. I want to *do* something. But I'm not a fighter.

BUTCHER
The guy you're replacing, Mallory? He was the best fighter I've ever seen. But he didn't have the <u>will</u>. He's dead now.
(pause)
I'll never make that mistake again. Now I only want guys like me. Who have that <u>will</u>. It ain't common.

HUGHIE
You think I'm like you?

BUTCHER
That's why I had the psych profile done. That's why I sought you out.

HUGHIE
The *psych profile*?

BUTCHER
You're intelligent. You're motivated. You're angry. I can teach you the rest.

Hughie shakes his head grimly.

HUGHIE
This is fucking crazy.

A moment of silence. Butcher nods to himself. Then...

BUTCHER
You know, he laughed his bollocks off about your girl.

HUGHIE
What are you talking about?

BUTCHER
The A-Train. Oh, he was freaked out at first, but the others talked him down. And then the jokes started flying.

HUGHIE
How do you know that?

BUTCHER
I bugged the Seven's H.Q., mate. You can listen to the tapes if you want.

Hughie stares at him, blood boiling.

HUGHIE
Tell me how. How can you do anything to them? They've got superpowers.

Butcher smiles. He produces a thick envelope, tosses it to Hughie. Inside is a fat wad of cash and a phone number.

BUTCHER
It's a few grand. Come to New York for a week or two. Call us when you're settled.

Hughie stares at the envelope as Butcher gets up.

BUTCHER
Let me show you what we do. You can make up you mind from there.
(hand on his shoulder)
Come and meet The Boys.

Butcher whistles to Terror, who lopes away after him.

Hughie is left alone in the gathering dark.

INT. NURSING HOME - REC ROOM - DAY

An African-American man (40) sits across from Butcher at a card table. He's built like a linebacker, but what stands out most is his calmness. It inspires confidence. This is:

SUPER: **MOTHER'S MILK**

He takes a slow sip of coffee, as the oldsters amble about.

BUTCHER
Come on, Milk. You know this doesn't work without you.

MOTHER'S MILK
Might have to.

BUTCHER
It won't. Frenchy and the Female are crazy as fuck...

MOTHER'S MILK
We did this before. And one of us got killed. Don't tell me this is about "deterrence." I know how it ends, Butcher. With the Seven. Bloody.

BUTCHER
You'd rather stay here? Wiping these geezer's asses?

MOTHER'S MILK
There's other ways to make a difference in the world.

An old man hobbles past them with the aid of a walker.

MOTHER'S MILK
Mr. Jacobson, I'm about to mix you up some more of that Fibercon.

MR. JACOBSON
You ain't the boss of me, darkie!

A deep sigh from Mothers Milk.

BUTCHER
Different generation, I suppose.
(smiles)
I got a new guy. You'll like him.

INT. HUGHIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hughie sits in his darkened apartment. It seems smaller than before, foreign. There's nothing left for him here.

He looks down. In his hands: the envelope Butcher gave him.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

ANNIE JANUARY (aka Starlight out of costume), meticulously packs her things into a number of boxes, careful to label each one. A HORN sounds outside.

WE INTERCUT HER JOURNEY WITH HUGHIE'S:

- HUGHIE stands in front of a fresh grave. Robin's. After a moment he turns away, walking toward a waiting taxi.

- ANNIE stands in front of her farmhouse, as MOVERS load the last of her boxes into a truck. There's nothing more to do. Her apprehension is written all over her face.

- HUGHIE, at the Glasgow airport, slaps down a wad of cash at the ticketing counter.

HUGHIE
I want to go to New York.

- ANNIE walks behind her house, pulling off her sweats to reveal her Starlight costume. Donning her mask, she SHOOTS OFF INTO THE SKY.

- As HUGHIE'S plane descends into J.F.K...

- ANNIE lands atop a small apartment building in the west village, her new home. She glances down-- it's a vibrant, energetic neighborhood. Annie looks overwhelmed.

- HUGHIE exits a cab in the middle of Times Square-- a riot of signs and tourists. Taking it in, he turns to a PASSERBY.

HUGHIE
Excuse me. Can you point me to a hotel?

PASSERBY
Fuck off, queer.

HUGHIE
Yeah. Cheers.

- We pull back, UP AND AWAY, getting a bird's-eye view of the island of Manhattan in all its teeming glory. We linger on something in the landscape that doesn't seem quite right: the TWISTED WRECKAGE OF THE DESTROYED BROOKLYN BRIDGE.

EXT. FLATIRON BUILDING - THE NEXT DAY

Hughie stares up at the iconic Flatiron Building. He seems to be trying to will himself to go inside.

As he deliberates, his eye is caught by a BRIGHTLY COLORED FLYER for some medical study. It reads: "Deck Stacked Against You? Tired of Being a Victim?"

He shakes his head, registering the irony as he goes inside.

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - SAME

Hughie walks through an under-construction floor. It's pretty rough: unpatched holes in the walls, stained floors.

The sound of voices ahead. As Hughie pushes through a clear plastic barrier, he sees Butcher and two others, black-clad as always: we recognize them as the FRENCHMAN and the FEMALE.

BUTCHER
Wee Hughie! You made it.

HUGHIE
You don't actually have to use the "Wee" part...

BUTCHER
Meet the Boys. Or at least, most of them. That's the Frenchman...

The wiry Frenchman embraces Hughie with enthusiasm.

FRENCHMAN
Ah Petit Hughie! I know we will further the "Auld Alliance."

HUGHIE
Sorry?

FRENCHMAN
We Francais hold the Scots in "*un certain regard.*" We share a sense of tragedy derived from British arrogance, and this we celebrate.

BUTCHER
... and over here is the Female of the Species.

Hughie amiably extends his hand toward her. Suddenly the Frenchman grabs his hand and jerks it away from her.

FRENCHMAN
Non!

BUTCHER
Not a good idea, mate. Believe me.

Hughie meets the Female's eyes. There is no malice there, but a mysterious and very deep latent violence. It's unsettling.

BUTCHER
She doesn't like to be touched. Anybody besides the Frenchman who does that gets dead.

Hughie looks at the oddly smiling Frenchman, the glowering Female, looking for something to say.

HUGHIE
Okay, then. So your names... are what you are.

FRENCHMAN
(chipper)
We are proud of who we are!

A voice cuts through the space.

MOTHER'S MILK (O.S.)
This place is disgusting.

Mother's Milk looks around the room, then at Butcher.

MOTHER'S MILK
What happened to standards, man?
What happened to pride?

BUTCHER
Come on, it's a New York classic.

MOTHER'S MILK
On the outside.

BUTCHER
(to Hughie)
Hughie, Mother's Milk.

Mother's Milk gives Hughie a cursory nod, muttering to himself as he opens his cell phone.

BUTCHER
All right. Down to business, gents...

FRENCHMAN
Pardon. Point of Order. The Female would like to order a pizza.

BUTCHER
(to the Female)
Didn't you have any lunch?

She subtly shakes her head.

BUTCHER
Bloody hell, luv. I'm always telling you you need to take better care of yourself.

Frenchman whips out his phone, joins Milk, who is on his.

MOTHER'S MILK
Facilities? We have a huge problem.

FRENCHMAN
Ah, bonjour. Rays Pizza? I am so happy to speak with you...

The Female wanders away, leaving Hughie with Butcher.

BUTCHER
So you see it ain't easy to brief this lot.
(MORE)

BUTCHER (CONT'D)
Pain in the ass, Mother's Milk... but frankly, this whole thing falls apart without him.

HUGHIE
And the other two? What do they do?

BUTCHER
Muscle.

Hughie looks from the Frenchman to the Female. Neither is exactly imposing.

BUTCHER
You'll see.

Mother's Milk returns, closing his phone.

MOTHER'S MILK
Crew's coming. Place will be fixed up by tomorrow night.

FRENCHMAN (O.S.)
Status update: pizza en route!

BUTCHER
Thrilling. Now down to business.

Mother's Milk holds up a finger, stopping him again.

MOTHER'S MILK
Hey, Hughie?

He puts a hand on Hughie's shoulder, gesturing to the room.

MOTHER'S MILK
Got distracted by this. I'm working with my shrink about understanding my need for order. But I meant to say I'm sorry about what happened with your girlfriend, Robin.

HUGHIE
Oh. Thanks.
(pause)
Did I... tell you her name?

MOTHER'S MILK
I learned it. I won't forget it. I know we haven't had a chance to talk yet, Hughie. But we will.

Hughie nods, looks around at the group. There's something strangely comforting about them.

HUGHIE
Why do they call you Mother's Milk?

BUTCHER
Christ! Can we please get to the bloody briefing?

EXT. THE SEVEN'S HOVERFORT - DAY

The Seven's headquarters hovers high above the city.

STARLIGHT (O.S.)
My goodness! I didn't think *you'd* be here!

INT. THE SEVEN'S HOVERFORT - LANDING BAY - SAME

Among the jump-jets and equipment, we find STARLIGHT in her sporty gold-and-white costume.

She walks next to the redoubtable HOMELANDER, the most super of heroes. Square-jawed, red-white-and-blue cape, he gives off a powerful air of patriotism and wholesome goodness.

HOMELANDER
Please. How could I miss this? We don't admit new members every day.

STARLIGHT
I'm flattered. I mean, you're the *Homelander*. I mean, you know that.
(pause)
I'm nervous. I'm very nervous.

HOMELANDER
Call me John. Your mother didn't name you "Starlight," did she?

STARLIGHT
Annie. Annie January.

HOMELANDER
Welcome to the Seven, Annie.

The pair of heroes walks down one of the elegant, curving passageways that grace the HQ.

STARLIGHT
I still can't believe I'm here.

HOMELANDER
You should. Your performance in the trials was remarkable. You know the magnitude of the talent you bested?

STARLIGHT
I've just admired you so long. Not for your strength... for your wisdom. Your kindness.

He smiles benevolently. They pass a tricked-out lab.

STARLIGHT
Just *look* at all this.

HOMELANDER
(shrugs)
It isn't about technology for technology's sake. It's about increasing our capacity for good.

STARLIGHT
Back in Des Moines with the Young Americans, we sometimes had to meet in a church basement or my cousin's apartment. Different world.

HOMELANDER
Do you think you'll miss them?

STARLIGHT
I'm sure I will.

HOMELANDER
Someone in particular?
(off her shy look)
You can tell me. I'm the Homelander.

STARLIGHT
It's Drummer Boy. We met at Capes for Christ '07 and then joined the group together. We... we don't want to ruin things, so we're waiting.

HOMELANDER
Outstanding.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Homelander gestures to a seat around the conference table.

HOMELANDER
Have a seat. You've earned it.

She does, looking around, finally getting comfortable.

STARLIGHT
I'm sorry for gushing like some naive farm girl. I do know I have something to offer. But to be here, to meet you, to have even a chance to be on this team... it's unimaginable.

She smiles, looking down at the table, shaking her head. He walks out of frame behind her.

HOMELANDER (O.S.)
I told you, Annie. You deserve this. There's just one more test, and I'm sure you'll ace it.

STARLIGHT
Mm?

She turns to look at him. FROM BEHIND, we see that his tights are around his ankles. Though we can't see his super-package, she most certainly can.

HOMELANDER
Suck it.

She gets out of her chair, backing away in utter shock.

STARLIGHT
S.. Su..

HOMELANDER
(helpfully)
Suck it.

STARLIGHT
W-what is wrong with you?!

HOMELANDER
N-nothing, except that I made a simple request, in Engish, and yet-- incredibly-- am encountering communication difficulties.
(pause)
Cup the balls, please. You can leave those gloves on. Sexy.

The door opens behind her. The A-Train and PROF. BRIAN BESTOR enter.

STARLIGHT
A-Train, Professor, thank the Lord! Something has happened to the Homelander! I think he's being mind controlled, like when the Insaniac infiltrated the OH MY GOD!!!!

PAN TO REVEAL, again from behind, that the A-Train has dropped his pants as well. He speaks in a hammy "trance."

A-TRAIN
Yes... Insaniac... controlling my junk...

PROFESSOR BESTOR
LET'S GET LARGE!

This catchphrase turns him into a red, incredibly muscle bound creature called BEASTIE. The transformation shreds his clothes, including his pants. Starlight backs away from them.

STARLIGHT
You're going to force me to...

HOMELANDER
Christ. No one's going to force you to do anything. We're the *Seven*.

A-TRAIN
We're the good guys!

HOMELANDER
It's just a question of how badly you want to join the team.

She brushes roughly past the A-Train and Beastie, headed for the door. Homelander calls after her.

HOMELANDER
Fair enough. Good luck back in the corn belt, with what's-his-name. And whatever they're called.

She stops. Thinking about the implications.

INT. THE BOYS HEADQUARTERS - FLATIRON BUILDING

We move across a row of headshots on a bulletin board, a superteam: BIG GAME, SHOUT OUT, POPCLAW, WHACK JOB, GUNPOWDER, JETSTREAK, DOGKNOTT, and SORCEROUS.

BUTCHER (O.S.)
Teenage Kix.

The Boys lounge on the floor of the still unfurnished headquarters. Hughie attentively watches. The Frenchman is focused lovingly on his slice of pizza.

BUTCHER
New President needs to take the Seven down a peg. We get to fire the warning shot.
(pointing at the board)
These lot are the big winners.

FRENCHMAN
(helpfully)
He does not mean this about "the winners", Petit Hughie. He is the sarcasm at the moment.

HUGHIE
Why them?

BUTCHER
They're basically a farm team for the Seven. They work their bullshit X-Games X-Box X-whatever angle, kick up some of their profits to the big boys. In return, the Seven back 'em up and make them feel important. Occasionally, one of them gets pulled up to the first division.

He pauses for effect, looking right at Hughie.

BUTCHER
Like your boy, the A-Train.

The name lands on Hughie, who holds Butcher's stare. Nods.

BUTCHER
We take out the Kix. The Seven get the message that we're back and things are gonna change, but we haven't hit them directly, so maybe they don't see the need to start a war that nobody wants. It's called...
(looking to Mother's Milk)
... *deterrence*.

HUGHIE
So what's the plan?

We close in on the headshots, art-directed for mass-appeal. Mainstream, inoffensive "rebels."

BUTCHER
You read the comic books, Hughie.
Care for a peek behind the mask?

INT. THE SEVEN'S HOVERFORT - BATHROOM - DAY

The bathroom is as gleaming and high tech as the rest of the HQ. An unfortunate retching sound comes from the stalls.

ANNIE (O.S.)
Oh lord...

Annie emerges from the stall, a wreck, to find QUEEN MAEVE, a stunning valkyrie of a woman in minimal Norse armor, applying foundation in the mirror. Even on her almost-godlike face are the trace of wrinkles, which she attacks with disdain.

She glances up in the mirror, catching sight of Annie.

ANNIE
Queen Maeve.

QUEEN MAEVE
Crying already?

Annie shakes her head. Starts to say something.

QUEEN MAEVE
Before we embarrass ourselves. I'm not your sister. I'm not your co-avenger-of-womanhood. I'm not your part-time lesbian crush. You and I both have a vagina, but we do not have a relationship. Okay?

She points out the traces of vomit sullying Annie's uniform.

QUEEN MAEVE
It's called latex, and it cleans up better. Look into it.
(pause)
So, what did you want to share?

ANNIE
I was going to say I always wanted to be like you.

QUEEN MAEVE
Yeah. See how you like it.

She shoulders past Annie, leaving her completely alone.

BIG GAME (O.S.)
Teenage Kix are GO!

CUT TO A VIEW THROUGH BINOCULARS:

The Teenage Kix are in an apartment building: though our view is incomplete, we can tell that they are enthusiastically and decadently "partying" with a collection of prostitutes... and an even larger collection of drugs.

INT. ABANDONED APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hughie stares through the binoculars, recording equipment at his feet. Next to him is Butcher, snapping pictures.

HUGHIE
This is Babylonian.

BUTCHER
This is ammunition.

On a popping flashbulb, we CUT TO A MONTAGE OF SURVEILLANCE:

AT A MOVIE PREMIERE

BIG GAME (the leader) and JETSTREAK (the speedster) escort a beautiful MOVIE STAR as the flashbulbs light their faces.

INSIDE THE THEATER BATHROOM

With childlike glee, the two superheroes snort coke off of the smiling starlet's back, making good use of her Prada gown's backless design.

HIDDEN IN A STALL: Mother's Milk, in a tux, records the decadence through a crack in the door.

IN A DARKENED ROOM

POPCLAW, the Goth girl, cuts herself with her own Wolverine-like blades and nods out.

AT A CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

WHACK JOB (a punk hero) entrances the children with a display of pyrotechnics. Doctors gather around to watch. Using the distraction, SORCEROUS (the magician) slips into the...

SUPPLY ROOM

... where he raids the hospital's drug supply. Above, camera poking out from behind a ceiling tile... is the Frenchman.

A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS

... of the Kix pairing off. Clearly, Big Game gets around: making out with POPCLAW, with SHOUT OUT, the (male) African-American aviator... and with the giant half-human DOGKNOTT.

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - DAY

Hughie and the group are looking through the incredibly incriminating fruits of their labor.

HUGHIE
I'm a little surprised. By the level of what they're into...
(pause)
It's a high level.

BUTCHER
Sex is sex, no beef with that...

FRENCHMAN
Oui. A hole is a hole and has no gender.

BUTCHER
... but this is America.

MOTHER'S MILK
This shit gets out, their sponsorships dry up. Frito Lay backs the hell off and there's no more money. And they need money.

Nodding, Butcher casually walks behind Hughie. He produces a high-tech INJECTION GUN from his coat. It's loaded with an IRIDESCENT BLUE FLUID.

FRENCHMAN
Oui. Their, as-you-say, hideout? It is beautiful. When I plant the bugs, I almost want to move in.

In one swift motion, Butcher INJECTS Hughie in the neck.

HUGHIE
AHHH! What the hell?

BUTCHER
Inoculation. Gotta boost your immune system in case one of these supes draws blood. We've all done it.

FRENCHMAN
They are so dirty. Some of them, they like to bite.

HUGHIE
How about warnin' me then?

BUTCHER
It's mandatory.

In the corner, the Female BANGS THE TABLE WITH HER FIST, gaining their attention. She pulls off a set of earphones, and hits a button labelled "Live Feed," and sound picked up by the bugs FILLS THE ROOM.

BIG GAME (O.S.)
That medicine was supposed to go to DYING CHILDREN!

POPCLAW (O.S.)
Who sent these photos?

BIG GAME (O.S.)
Drugs for dying children! You two assholes...

WHACK JOB (O.S.)
What did I do?

SORCEROUS (O.S.)
They can get more.

BIG GAME (O.S.)
This is serious. A member of our team stealing medicine...

GUNPOWDER (O.S.)
How about the LEADER of our team SCREWING half of our team, including Rover here. I'm beginning to feel a little left out.

SHOUT OUT (O.S.)
You slut. How could you, Big Game? With this... thing?

DOGKNOTT (O.S.)
Obviously he isn't getting something from you, Shout Out.

The sound of a SCUFFLE.

JET STREAK (O.S.)
Break it up!

IN THE HQ, the group, except the stunned Hughie, are hugely amused. The Frenchman is rolling on the floor with laughter.

DOGKNOTT (O.S.)
Uh... there's a note.

GUNPOWDER (O.S)
Give it to somebody who can read, Dogknott.

JET STREAK (O.S.)
(reading)
"Someone gets thrown to the wolves. You decide who. You decide why. Decide today. Or I will tomorrow."

DOGKNOTT (O.S.)
What does that mean?

BIG GAME (O.S.)
It means they are going to expose one of us to the media, unless we do it first.

JET STREAK (O.S.)
It should be Popclaw.

POPCLAW (O.S.)
You little bitch!!!!!

As the argument continues, Butcher smiles.

BUTCHER
We're back in business.

INT. SEVEN BOARDROOM - DAY

The team is gathered around the conference table. Homelander stands at the front, before the assembled Seven.

Off to the side sits a suited young executive. He exudes confidence and control... but says nothing. We will come to know him as the VOUGHT REP.

HOMELANDER
Though some of you have already met her informally... it's my distinct pleasure to officially welcome our newest member. Starlight, would you like to say a few words?

Starlight stands slowly, taking in the room. A slurping sound is barely audible. Out of the corner of her eye, Annie can see A-Train making the universal gesture for "sucking cock."

ANNIE
Proud to be here.

THE DEEP stands. He's an aquatic-themed hero with a DIVING BELL on his head.

THE DEEP
Fine, yes, thank you Starlight. Now, moving on to the question of merchandizing...

QUEEN MAEVE
Christ.

She takes a long pull from her ever-present martini glass.

THE DEEP
We are still wondering why Homelander, Maeve, and Black Noir receive a full two percent while the rest of us remain mired at one.

Black Noir speaks in an inimitable surly growl.

BLACK NOIR
We're the Big Three, is what.

THE DEEP
That is an informal term, not...

HOMELANDER
Read your contract. It's all there.

THE DEEP
I was called from my ancient ancestral home to fight for the oppressed, not to read the fine print on a contract. I want my points.

BLACK NOIR
How about I'll wrestle you for the points? You're a pussy in a gay-ass diving helmet and you'll take what you get. Motion proposed and adopted.

HOMELANDER
Speaking of contracts, Starlight, your binding non-disclosure is in the works but I'll take a verbal consent to that now?

Silence.

BLACK NOIR
Answer's yes, tits.

ANNIE
Yes.

HOMELANDER
Now, on to pressing business...

Next to Annie, the slurping sound begins again. This time, the Homelander takes notice. As he continues, the Vought Rep catches the Homelander's eye.

A-TRAIN (O.S.)
Aaaaarrrh! Stop!

INT. CORRIDOR - A BIT LATER

Homelander stands over the doubled-over A-Train.

HOMELANDER
What was that supposed to be? That juvenile slurping bullshit?

A-TRAIN
It was just a joke.

HOMELANDER
A joke? Bad enough I've got to handle that petty marketing crap. That was an official meeting of the Seven. That means playtime is *over*.

A-Train recoils, raising his hand reflexively. Homelander's eyes GLOW with menace, his heat-rays spooling up.

HOMELANDER
Did you just raise a hand to me?

A-TRAIN
No. Jesus, Homelander, come on...

HOMELANDER
That man represents Vought-American. That's the money. They're the comic books. They're the merchandizing. They're the magic goddam floating space station. You don't fuck around with the money in the room. Ever.

A-TRAIN
I know.

HOMELANDER
Get it through your head or I will burn you down, frat boy.
(pause)
What's coming in the next week is new territory, even for us. I need professionalism. I need focus.

He turns and starts walking away.

HOMELANDER
Stay on the floor 'til I'm gone.

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - NIGHT

The Boys are gathered around a television, watching as a press conference is about to start.

MOTHER'S MILK
Bets on who it'll be?

FRENCHMAN
It is the Popclaw, I think. She is a most unimpressive girl. Bags under the eye and an awkward gait.

HUGHIE
But she's the only girl in the group. They can't lose her.

BUTCHER
Good point. First test, Hughie. Who gets the axe?

Hughie thinks a second and points at the board.

HUGHIE
Well... start with who it can't be. They all seem to hate Gunpowder, but no Gunpowder, no NRA sponsorship. Can't be JetStreak. He's their Hollywood connection. Can't be Whack Job or Sorcerous-- they've been best mates their whole lives. One goes, both go, and then you've lost a quarter of your team.

Butcher looks at Mother's Milk, who shrugs.

HUGHIE
So you're down to Big Game, Dogknott, or Shout-Out. Big Game's the leader.
(MORE)

HUGHIE (CONT'D)
No way he falls on his sword. Dogknott is popular with the kids, God help us. So... it's Shout-Out.

FRENCHMAN
It does reek of truth, no?

Butcher nods, actually impressed.

HUGHIE
I told you. I know how these things...

Mother's Milk whistles, points to the TV screen.

MOTHER'S MILK
Here we go.

ON THE TELEVISION SCREEN

Shout-Out stands behind a podium, flanked by group members.

SHOUT-OUT
... and, yes, I am... a gay superhuman. Keeping this a secret from you has compromised your trust, and the stresses of living a double life have affected my work.
(pause)
I can't make this a distraction from our vital mission, so I will be leaving the team, effective immediately.

JET STREAK
The rest of us will take a step back for now. We need to examine, through team-building exercises, how we may have created a hostile work environment where our friend could not simply be... himself.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - HOVERFORT OF THE SEVEN - DAY

The Seven are also watching the press conference on one of their numerous plasmas. Homelander simmers.

HOMELANDER
I take it we can all see what's going on.

A-TRAIN
Yeah. Shout-Out is a secret 'Mo.

Black Noir looks at him with utter disdain.

BLACK NOIR
You shouldn't be allowed to speak.

HOMELANDER
I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about who made this *sacrifice* happen.

QUEEN MAEVE
It's got Butcher's name written all over it. It's just his style.

THE DEEP
I thought that was over.

HOMELANDER
You think he was just going to go away? This is message to <u>us</u>. He's telling us we could be next.

A-TRAIN
Who's "Butcher"?

He stops himself abruptly, noticing Homelander's cold stare. In the resulting icy silence, Annie raises her hand.

ANNIE
Shouldn't we do something? A show of support for Shout-Out? I think that as leaders of the community, we should step up and make a statement.

QUEEN MAEVE
But you're Christian. You hate gay people.

ANNIE
That's actually not true at...

HOMELANDER
Noted, Starlight. By the way, memo from Vought-American. New costume concept for you. Something more photogenic. More or less...

He walks toward her, scooping up a marker from the table and drawing a deep "V" shape across the front of her costume-- an extremely revealing and cleavage-forward design.

HOMELANDER
Like this. In leather.

ANNIE
I don't... uh... leather?

Homelander nods, casually tossing the marker away.

BLACK NOIR
Homelander. If Butcher's back, this is mutual-assured-destruction shit at the worst possible time.

THE DEEP
Do you think he knows what we're about to do?

BLACK NOIR
If he does, we're done.

STARLIGHT
Who is this Butcher?

BLACK NOIR
Billy Butcher! The fucking Boys!

Homelander turns to the confused Starlight.

HOMELANDER
Annie. You may not like us. You may think we're repulsive. But we save lives. We help people. The Boys are anarchists. Terrorists. They kill heroes. They killed the one you replaced. And now they're back.

Homelander lets this sink in. Annie looks shocked.

BLACK NOIR
What do we do?

HOMELANDER
We push back. I have to make a call. To let the Kix know who to thank.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

The Boys leave the Flatiron Building, moving into the night.

BUTCHER
Everybody get some rest. High marks on the opening salvo.
(shaking his head)
"I'm gay?" In this day and age? What a pussy way out.

FRENCHMAN
See, Hughie? Their balls have been clipped. At each others' throats, full of the hate...

He stops, seeing something down the street. Butcher has seen it, too.

BUTCHER
For fuck's sake.

We see what they see: some running, some flying, all pissed off, the TEENAGE KIX are coming. When they get close, they land and take combat positions. Big Game steps to the front.

BIG GAME
Surprised to see us?

Butcher just smiles as the Boys spread out behind him. Hughie doesn't know exactly what to do with himself. The Frenchman lowers his goggles.

BIG GAME
You blackmail us, you try to destroy us as a team, but you don't have the balls to face us?

Butcher is shaking his head, laughing under his breath.

BIG GAME
I don't know who you are, or why you decided to mess with us, but this ends NOW. Teenage Kix!

JETSTREAK
Teenage Fucking Kix!

BIG GAME
Remember that na... WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU LAUGHING AT, YOU STUPID SON OF A BITCH?!

Butcher wipes his eye, walking toward Big Game.

BUTCHER
Can't help it. It's just... it didn't have to come to this...
(pause)
... and I'm just so happy it did!

Insanely fast, he strides forward and HEAD-BUTTS Big Game. A sharp CRACK rings into the night.

<u>And we finally see the Boys in action</u>:

The Frenchman SCREAMS LIKE A BANSHEE as he and the Female charge at the line of superheroes, plowing through them like they are bowling pins, so fast the heroes can barely react.

FRENCHMAN
Aiiiiiiiieeeeee!

The heroes reel away from the cloud of punches, gouges and head-butts the Frenchman and Female unleash. Bones crack and blood spurts as Whack Job and Shout Out are slammed into the ground and pummelled with insane fury.

Dogknott tries to leap into the fray... the giant creature is KICKED 50 FEET across the street by the Female.

ON HUGHIE: in shock as the "muscle of the group" beat the living shit out of the supes. He can only utter a quiet...

HUGHIE
Jings.

Gunpowder whips up a large, thick TECHNO-PISTOL, trying to get a bead on the frenzied scrum involving the Frenchman and Female. By the time the array of sights and laser enhancers fold out of the weapon, Mother's Milk is on him.

Gunpowder cracks off a shot-- in one motion, Mother's Milk sidesteps it, grabs the gun, and crushes it in his hand. As the unspent ammo COOKS OFF, he smashes Gunpowder's helmet to pieces with a haymaker. AT THE SAME TIME--

JETSTREAK launches himself at Butcher, blurring with speed... Suddenly, he stops.

JETSTREAK
Ackk!

Frenchman, a bloodied Whack Job at his feet, has caught JetStreak in mid-superstride by the neck.

FRENCHMAN
Unfortunately, now the nuts.

He drives his knee into the aforementioneds, folding JetStreak like a newspaper.

ON HUGHIE

In the middle of a superhuman brawl, he still has no idea what to do.

ACROSS THE STREET

Popclaw springs across the hood of a car, slashing at the Female. Her talons sing through the air, slicing a few hairs from the Female's head.

The Female leaps onto her, grabbing her face in hand. A few ripping motions and...

POPCLAW
Ohmygodddddddddddddd!

Shout-Out staggers to his feet and notices Hughie, standing, frozen down the street. Shout Out launches himself toward Hughie, firing lightning blasts which barely miss.

Hughie stumbles backward, trying to get away.

ON MOTHER'S MILK

... who whips his head around just in time to see DOGKNOTT charging him on all fours. He lowers his shoulder into the impact. Both go down.

ON BUTCHER

As Shout-Out flies by, right for Hughie, Butcher reaches up and snags him by the crotch.

ON HUGHIE

... still backing up... right into Sorcerous.

SORCEROUS
Allow me to split ye in twee, punk.

Sorcerous whips him around and to the ground, throttling him. Hughie tries to pry his hands off his neck with no luck.

SORCEROUS
Teenage Kix...

HUGHIE
Urrgh...

Sorcerous raises up his fist. MAGIC ENERGY swirls around his fist as he prepares for the coup de grace.

SORCEROUS
... ARE HOT TONIGHT!

Panicked, with his last gasp, Hughie LASHES OUT.

HUGHIE
Aaaaaaaaarrrrrh!

We hear a SICKENING, WET THUD. Sorcerous' expression goes from imperious to confused.

ON EACH OF THE BOYS' FACES

Surprise, even shock. Even the Female seems taken aback.

BUTCHER
Oh, shit.

ON HUGHIE

We see that he has PUNCHED RIGHT THROUGH Sorcerous' chest.

HUGHIE
Oh my GOD!

Sorcerous coughs up some blood and then slides into Hughie.

He's dead.

ON BUTCHER

Still holding Shout-Out by the crotch.

BUTCHER
Jesus, Hughie! You aren't supposed to KILL THEM!

Shout-Out BLASTS BUTCHER in the face with an electrical bolt.

Butcher, no time for this, RIPS OFF one of Shout-Out's thumbs. Screaming, Shout-Out and other Kix beat a retreat.

NEAR HUGHIE

The Boys have rushed to Hughie to help. They try to pull the impaled Sorcerous off of Hughie's arm.

FRENCHMAN
Calmez vous, Hughie.

HUGHIE
Get him off me! Just get him off...

FRENCHMAN
You must unclench the fist...

MOTHER'S MILK
Just don't look at it... think about something else.

HUGHIE
Aaaaahhhh!!!

Finally, they manage to pull the dead supe off of Hughie and place his body onto the ground.

MOTHER'S MILK
Just breathe and get your shit straight, Hughie. It's okay...

Butcher arrives. He shakes his head, looking at the body.

BUTCHER
Christ, Hughie...

Hughie stares at Butcher, trying and failing to form words, then scrambling away down the street.

BUTCHER
Now they're gonna have one of those tedious goddam funerals...

MOTHER'S MILK
This will be a problem for us.

BUTCHER
Clean it up.

He takes off after Hughie.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Horrified, in shock, Hughie stumbles away from the scene. He falls against a parked car and vomits all over the hood.

BUTCHER (O.S.)
That's a pretty nice paint job you're ruining. You okay?

Hughie doesn't answer, focusing on the ground, trying to catch his breath. Butcher looks around.

BUTCHER
Time to take this on the road.

HUGHIE
I... I punched right through him.

BUTCHER
Accurately summarized.

HUGHIE
How did I do that?

BUTCHER
Compound V. I had to dose you.

HUGHIE
What the hell is Compound V?!

BUTCHER
It's what makes the supes super. What, you think they were all exposed to radiation or gamma rays?

HUGHIE
Uhh... yeah. Everyone knows that.

BUTCHER
That's what the comic books say, but it's bullshit. All these powers come from a drug. Whether they inject it, it comes from contaminated water, or it's inherited, it's all from Compound V. It alters your D.N.A., and voila... superpowers.

HUGHIE
My D.N.A?!

BUTCHER
Relax. We've all done it. At a dose this small, it's a glorified steroid. We can't fly or shoot flames out of our ass-- it just toughens us up. It's the only way to survive against them.

HUGHIE
How about *asking* me?

Butcher looks at him, unapologetic.

BUTCHER
What would your answer have been?

Hughie trembles with anger. Storms off.

BUTCHER
Hughie.

HUGHIE
I'm out.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - NIGHT

Hughie wanders alone through the park, no idea where to go. He is oblivious to everything around him.

On a park bench, the same bright FLYER from before: "Deck Stacked Against You? Tired Of Being a Victim?" It's like a mantra.

He sits down on the bench, staring out.

HUGHIE
Fuck me.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Hughie is still on the park bench. He's clearly spent the night here. He's calm now, but very pensive.

VOICE (O.S.)
Mind if I share this with you?

He looks up to see Annie standing there, sunlight shimmering behind her like some kind of halo.

HUGHIE
Be my guest.

They both avoid looking at each other as she settles in. The Midwesterner in her can't help but start a conversation.

ANNIE
So, uh, are you English?

HUGHIE
Oh, no. Scottish.

ANNIE
I'm sorry. I've heard that's a sensitive topic. With the British and the Scots.

HUGHIE
Look, you didn't think I was an Aussie. Then we'd have had words.

ANNIE
(a smile)
So are you here on vacation...?

HUGHIE
A job. Had a pretty bad day at work yesterday. I think I have to quit.

ANNIE
Yeah? Why?

He looks at her, decides he might as well be honest.

HUGHIE
The people. I can't trust them.

ANNIE
Yeah, I can kind of relate to that.
(pause)
So why are you still here?

HUGHIE
Don't have anything to go back to. I thought this job would fill up this... hole, but it's obvious now it won't. Nothing will.
(pause)
It's an important job. But I don't know if I can be the guy they need me to be. And something... really bad has already happened. You know what I'm saying?

ANNIE
You have no idea.

Something in her voice hints that there is a lot to tell.

HUGHIE
Come on, then. You can tell me.

ANNIE
Well... I made some compromises. To get what I always wanted. And I tell myself in the end it will be worth it, that I'll make up for it because it'll give me more power to do good, but...
(pause)
How do I know it will be worth it?

He nods. A moment of odd comfort. He leans back, looking out at the park.

HUGHIE
If I don't stay, I'll miss this place. Did a lot of reading about it before I came. Studied up. Did you know a lot of these wee streams are completely fake? They have these wee taps and the parkies turn 'em on and off for ambience.

Annie laughs.

ANNIE
What's your name?

HUGHIE
It's Hughie.

ANNIE
Annie.

He stands up.

HUGHIE
Maybe I'll see you back around here?

ANNIE
When you come back to enjoy the "wee springs ambience?"

HUGHIE
It's a passion.

She smiles at him. Hesitates, then...

ANNIE
I really needed someone to be nice to me. Thank you.

HUGHIE
Ah, easiest thing in the world to be nice to you. Just comes natural.

He looks at her, a small smile on his face.

HUGHIE
You're the first good thing I've seen in a while.

He turns to go. After a moment, behind him, unseen to him, she takes to the air and is gone.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - LATER

A swarm of helicopters crowds the morning sky.

TILT DOWN TO REVEAL a massive FUNERAL underway in the park. Thousands of fans and well-wishers, bearing candles.

The flag-draped coffin of Sorcerous sits on a dais among a slew of dignitaries and the remainder of the Teenage Kix. Behind them a massive grandstand is packed with SCORES OF SUPERHEROES-- a solemn, powerful display of solidarity.

TELEVISION VANS ring the proceedings, a dutiful REPORTER standing in front of each. We see snippets of interviews:

--BIG GAME, his nose caved in:

BIG GAME
He was justh happy to have the chansth to give back to the kidth.

--HOLY MARY, a fishnet-wearing super nun:

HOLY MARY
J.F.K., John Lennon, Abraham Lincoln... now we've lost another.

--Former Kix member SHOUT-OUT:

SHOUT OUT
He was a good friend. He really helped me out with... my gayness.

--A TEARFUL FAN:

TEARFUL FAN
They took your life, but they could not take... your pride.

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - SAME

Butcher, Mother's Milk and the Female watch the coverage. As they crack up, a voice:

HUGHIE (O.S.)
We need to talk.

Butcher looks over. Hughie is at the door, deadly serious.

EXT. FLAT IRON BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Butcher joins Hughie outside. Hughie's agitation is obvious.

BUTCHER
If you've dragged me out here for an apology, it's not comin'.

HUGHIE
You drugged me... made me into some freak. Made me into one of them.

BUTCHER
You are who you are. I just levelled the playing field.

Butcher starts walking down the street. Hughie follows.

HUGHIE
I killed someone!

BUTCHER
Yeah. Probably won't be the last time, either. What did you think? We tell the supes what's what and they just bend over? This is the job. If I hadn't dosed you, the first supe to swing at you would've taken your head off.

HUGHIE
So instead I'll just rip myself to pieces next time I have a wank.

BUTCHER
Nah. If that were possible I would've discovered it by now.

Hughie scoffs, not in the mood to joke around.

BUTCHER
Admit it, deep down, that felt good. Felt like you finally got a bit of yourself back. You want revenge? That's revenge.

HUGHIE
Not against him.

BUTCHER
They're all the same. Trust me.

HUGHIE
Listen to you. All of your proclamations about the *job* and the *greater good*. It's all bullshit.

BUTCHER
Is it, now?

HUGHIE
Yeah. And all that talk about avenging my girlfriend? I'll bet you can't even name her anymore.
(points at him)
This is about you. Something happened. To you. And now you're out for blood.
(pause)
So? What happened? Why are we really here?

The briefest flicker of something on Butcher's face.

BUTCHER
Do you know that the supes have a casualty allowance?

HUGHIE
No. I don't know anything.

BUTCHER
It's the acceptable amount of civilians killed in a rescue attempt. For a SWAT team, it's less than 20 percent. But with the supes, it's *sixty percent.* Why do you think that is?

Hughie doesn't answer.

BUTCHER
Because *they're not good at it.* Just a bunch of amateurs who declared themselves heroes. They're not trained, or licensed, or authorized by anyone.
(pause)
They can screw up as much as they want. Take anything they want. And no one will say a word. Not even the military. You know why?

HUGHIE
I don't know. Maybe they're scared of 'em. Maybe they've got people protecting them.

BUTCHER
Bingo. And that's where we come in.

A pause. Hughie looks up at Butcher.

HUGHIE
You didn't answer my question.

Butcher stops, stares at Hughie for a minute. He points to the COMIC SHOP that they're now standing in front of.

BUTCHER
In there. You think what we're doing is wrong, you question where my head's at, you think the ends we're after don't justify *any* means... talk to the Legend.

Hughie looks at the shop, realizing that Butcher has been leading him here the whole time.

BUTCHER
You listen to him and you still want out, I'll swim you across the Atlantic on my fucking back.

Butcher walks away, leaving Hughie alone, his head spinning. Then a voice calls out from down the block.

BUTCHER (O.S.)
Her name was Robin.

INT. FAT BROTHERS COMIC STORE - SAME

A surprisingly clean and well-lit comic store. A sprawling supermarket of books, action figures, and nerd memorabilia.

As Hughie enters, GUISEPPE, one of the owners, easily 275 pounds, nods at him.

GUISEPPE
Downstairs. He's expecting you.

INT. COMIC STORE BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Hughie descends a rickety staircase into the dimly lit basement of the shop. Boxes are piled to the ceiling-- a winding maze of carefully archived comics.

Hughie looks around, pulls a comic from one of the boxes-- an early issue of *Tek Knight & Laddio* in pristine condition.

THE LEGEND (O.S.)
You read this crap?

An old man shuffles out from the shadows. Gruff, short and bald, he has the look of an old newspaper man-- suspenders, thick glasses, battered cigar. This is THE LEGEND.

HUGHIE
Well, uh... yeah every once in a...
(off Legend's look)
Just about all of them.

THE LEGEND
Why not? They're fun, huh?
Superheroes are fun.
(smiles)
They're even more fun when you know the truth behind 'em.

The Legend pulls out a stack of comics at random. He throws the first one down on the table-- "Hellcat".

THE LEGEND
Rapist.

Another one-- "Adventures of Swingwing."

THE LEGEND
Pederast.

One by one, the Legend throws them down, commenting on each.

THE LEGEND
Thrill killer. Junkie. Sadist. She's a he. Captain Daring? More like Captain Date Rape.

Another-- "OctoMan."

HUGHIE
I thought he died saving the earth from a saucer attack.

THE LEGEND
Nope. OD'ed in Thailand.

HUGHIE
Jings. It's like a nightmare.

THE LEGEND
Hence the comics, kid. It's where they put out the "official version" of things. The public gets to read about heroics and crusaders for justice, and the supes get to live their twisted lives with impunity.
(shrugs)
Works for you guys, though. Hard to blackmail folks when the public already knows they're assholes.

HUGHIE
Why would anyone want to *protect* these guys?

THE LEGEND
Because they *make money.*

He points to the cover of the Tek Knight issue that Hughie is still holding-- the RED "V" on the cover.

THE LEGEND
Victory Comics, my ass. That V is for "Vought."

The comic's logo DISSOLVES INTO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - SAME

... the "V" pin on the lapel of the Seven's VOUGHT REP. He sits behind VICE PRESIDENT VICTOR BASS, a stocky career politician, who stands over a memorial for Sorcerous.

The voice of WOLF BLITZER echoes from a nearby jumbotron.

WOLF BLITZER (V.O.)
...Vice President Bass, lighting the eternal flame... and a moment of silence to remember Sorcerous...

The crowd hushes as the V.P. lowers the torch to a brass flame pot at the base of the memorial. It catches, and for a moment we only hear flames flickering in the breeze.

Then, the tender strains of a lone piano...

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

The Boys watch as, on the television, JOSH GROBAN sings "Wind Beneath My Wings" to the assembled mourners.

MOTHER'S MILK
V.P.'s making a big statement by being there. I thought the administration was distancing themselves from the supes.

BUTCHER
Maybe he's more loyal to Vought than to the President. They bought him onto the ticket, even though he can barely string two sentences together. Interesting.

A pause. They contemplate the screen as the music plays.

BUTCHER
Fucking Josh Groban.

MOTHER'S MILK
Don't let me go out like that, Butcher.

BUTCHER
No way, brother.

INT. FAT BROTHERS COMICS - BASEMENT - SAME

The Legend continues with Hughie, pulling out a file.

THE LEGEND
You ever hear about the M-20 assault rifle?

HUGHIE
Should I have?

THE LEGEND
Manufactured by Vought Industries. Great gun. Unless you had to shoot it. Which, in Vietnam, we needed to. But, when you cut corners on the firing pins...

The Legend slaps down an old war photograph-- *hundreds of soldiers' heads impaled on assault rifles in a clearing.*

THE LEGEND
Sorry, boys.

HUGHIE
Christ...

THE LEGEND
Now, Vought had a long and glorious history of flooding the military with dangerous, shoddy products. The F7 fighter plane in WWII. The pinless grenade in Korea. Vought always had enough congressmen paid for to keep the contracts coming.
(taps the photo)
But 500 severed heads in the Ia Drang valley can't be smoothed over. Suddenly asses are on the line. They need something big. So, three years later...

As the Legend continues we see: *Grainy color news footage of a massive crater in the desert.*

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
A meteor strikes central Wyoming.

HUGHIE (V.O.)
The Homelander.

- A naked blue-eyed infant stares up at his rescuers.

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
Bingo. Little baby at the bottom of a crater. All the way from the stars, all alone. Within a week, he's a boy, next week, a teenager. A miracle child. Even better, an <u>American</u> miracle. It's perfect...
(a smile)
...'cept it's all bullshit.

HUGHIE (V.O.)
Vought made him? With that Compound...?

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
Compound V. Sure, there had been supes before-- the compound occurs naturally every once in a while. The *difference* is Vought learned how to *make* it. So they could make up any hero they wanted, with a story to match. They inject the compound into a fetus, implant the thing in some broad from one of their drug trials... kills her stone dead at birth, but who gives a shit? You've got the *Homelander*.

- A now-adult Homelander stands before an eager press conference. He is all strength and apple pie... the ultimate American hero. Behind him-- the Vought logo. His sponsor.

THE LEGEND
Every supe that had come before paled in front of this guy. He's a nuke to their dynamite.

- The Homelander streaks across the clear blue sky as people look up in awe.

THE LEGEND
He's handsome. He's brave. He's *American*. He's the hero everyone wants. People can't get enough of him. And he belongs to Vought.
(pause)
So they make six more.

HUGHIE
Queen Maeve, Black Noir, Beastie, The Deep, Lamplighter, Marathon...

The Legend slaps an old comic down in front of Hughie... issue number one of THE SEVEN.

THE LEGEND
Give the kid a prize.

On the sound of BAGPIPES, we CUT TO:

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - SAME

A dozen BAGPIPERS, kilts and all, play a lonely send-off as the KIX carry Sorcerous's coffin to a waiting hearse.

Videoing this from the crowd is the Frenchman. He's wearing an "I Heart New York" shirt that looks freshly-bought. Without his goggles and trenchcoat, he blends in just fine.

He seems amused by the bagpipes. He mumbles to himself.

FRENCHMAN
I would not have guessed him to be a Scot.

As the song continues, the Frenchman notices something:

One of the heroes in the grandstands is clutching her head in agony. It's SISQUATCH, a sort of a hairy female bigfoot type.

As she writhes in pain, two SUITED VOUGHT MEN discreetly but hurriedly escort her off the stage. Almost immediately, a van is there to meet them.

ON THE FRENCHMAN, videotaping as she is hustled into the van.

The SLAM of the van door is followed by a SCREAM and a SICKENING, WET CRACK. We can't see what has happened... we can only see the Frenchman's surprised expression.

FRENCHMAN
Mon dieu...

INT. COMIC BOOK STORE - BASEMENT - SAME

Hughie flips through some old Seven comics, fascinated by the Legend's tale.

HUGHIE
Why'd they make only Seven?

THE LEGEND
That weak little booster shot Butcher gave you?
(MORE)

THE LEGEND (CONT'D)
It cost 19 billion dollars. Imagine what it costs to build real superheroes from the ground up. Sure they've tried to go cheaper, but look what you get.

HUGHIE
Shite heroes.

THE LEGEND
The Paddy Wagon? Mr. Banjo? Give me a fucking break. The Seven are their cash cow. Even Payback and the Young Americans are nothing compared to them. Yeah, Vought's making money hand over fist with the Seven.
(pause)
But the real money is still on the table. Defense Contracting. Vought wants the government to buy supes instead of missiles... because they've cornered that market. They just need to demo the product.
(pause)
And that's why there ain't a Brooklyn Bridge anymore.

FLASH TO AN IMAGE: A CRUISE SHIP floats ominously up the EAST RIVER. Visible on the decks are masked gunmen, recalling footage of the '72 Munich Olympics.

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
When those terrorists took that cruise ship, Vought got their chance for a field test. They had the SEALS called off.

Nighttime. The ship is anchored near the Brooklyn Bridge.

THE LEGEND (O.S.)
This was going to be the big coming out party for the Seven.

FROM HIGH ABOVE, the Seven descend under cover of night. They look powerful, majestic... like heroes.

HOMELANDER
Let's fuck these towel heads!

FLASHES-- quick, one second vignettes of the ensuing events.

-- The Seven burst into the ship's BALLROOM. It's teeming with people-- terrorists and hundreds of hostages, many strapped with explosives.

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
Of course, they're not trained or anything. Don't know shit about negotiation, or tactics... they just think-- we're The Seven...

-- A screaming match between the terrorists and a clueless Seven. A gun cocks. The Homelander's eyes GLOW RED...

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
We're super...

-- Carnage. Super-powers versus bullets. A horrific, indiscriminate battle with the hostages right in the middle.

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
We can do this...

-- Covered in blood, the Homelander storms toward a chained door at the back of the room. From all sides, screams of the injured and dying...

-- The GALLEY door explodes off its hinges...

-- and the Homelander stares down at a MASSIVE DIRTY BOMB. Its wiring is beyond complex, and it's timed to explode in less than a minute.

-- CLOSE ON the Homelander, who suddenly goes totally blank.

HOMELANDER
Fuck this.

-- The Homelander strides back through the ballroom, past the innocents pleading for help, past the injured Lamplighter, whose outstretched hand he kicks out of the way...

--Panicked, the rest of the Seven drop what they're doing.

THE DEEP
Wait for us...

--Cries for help echo as the Seven (now six) stream into the night sky, leaving the ship alone in dark water.

On the sound of an *EXPLOSION*, we cut to the final image:

-- Rescue boats searching in vain for survivors beneath the twisted wreckage of the Brooklyn Bridge

THE LEGEND (V.O.)
You know the numbers...

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Hughie looks truly shaken. The Legend smiles grimly.

THE LEGEND
That's what you get when a bunch of idiots in tights try to save the day.

HUGHIE
Jesus Christ.

THE LEGEND
'Course, that's a different version than the one everyone's been told. The valiant paratroopers, the failed rescue... easy enough to cover the truth, when most of the reliable witnesses are dead.

HUGHIE
How do you know all of this?

The Legend motions to the stacks of boxes surrounding them.

THE LEGEND
I wrote the story that was <u>supposed</u> to happen. The version where the Seven saved the day. Pre-packaged to roll out the next week. Never issued, for obvious reasons.

HUGHIE
You're a *writer?*

THE LEGEND
Name one of their heroes, I'll tell you 25 stories I wrote for them.

The Legend's face darkens, barely containing a deep rage.

THE LEGEND
But I couldn't stomach it after the bridge. Couldn't write propaganda for the Seven. They are a new level. They are <u>evil</u>. And everybody worships them. Didn't you, before you learned for yourself?

The Legend leans forward, looking right into his eyes.

THE LEGEND
Everything you've read, everything you were taught about these *heroes* is a lie. Butcher's the only one willing to buck that tide. He's doing God's work.
(pause)
Don't ever question who the good guys are.

INT. THE BOYS HQ - DAY

The team, minus Hughie, is huddled around a video monitor, watching a playback of the funeral proceedings.

BUTCHER
Why exactly do I have to suffer through this horseshit again?

MOTHER'S MILK
Trust me. You're going to want to see this. It's big and it's weird.

ON THE SCREEN: the funeral plays out on the Frenchman's video. Mother's Milk manipulates the image, zooming in and cleaning it up. THE BAGPIPERS play their farewell salute.

BUTCHER
Those bagpipes are killing me. When did a bagpipe come to equal tragic grandeur?

FRENCHMAN
Speaking of this... do you think our Scotty is coming back? I like him, yes, he is personable, but...

MOTHER'S MILK
I think he's worth it. Dude punched a hole through Sorcerous.

On the screen, the Bagpipers' version of "Amazing Grace" climaxes. Mother's Milk zooms in on SISQUATCH as she holds her head in pain and is hustled to the van. Then...

BUTCHER
Did her head just *explode*?

They take this in for a second. In the other monitors, no one at the ceremony seems to have noticed.

MOTHER'S MILK
So that's why the press release about her going into some Dimensional Portal to fight the Galaxor or some shit.

FRENCHMAN
It was a clumsy fiction.

Butcher rewinds it, and they watch her head explode again.

FRENCHMAN
Who is this Sisquatch?

MOTHER'S MILK
Payback brought her up from the Zoo Crüe to replace the Tek Knight when he flamed out.

BUTCHER
This is different. And Vought's trying pretty hard to cover it up. Could be what we're looking for.

MOTHER'S MILK
So what's the move?

BUTCHER
Maybe the guy who Sisquatch replaced has a beef. Maybe he can be motivated to talk. He *did* have access to the Seven.

They notice that Hughie is standing in the door. He and Butcher share a look. A moment, then...

HUGHIE
Then let's make him talk.

EXT. TEK MANOR - DAY

An enormous gothic mansion sits far back on a sprawling country estate outside the city.

TEK KNIGHT (V.O.)
Thomas, I'm begging you.

INT. TEK MANOR - GRAND FOYER - SAME

The Tek Knight, aka Robert Vernon, the blue-armored hero we saw in the beginning, is following THOMAS, his grey-haired butler as Thomas wheels his luggage toward the front door.

THOMAS
I'm sorry Master Robert, but my position here is no longer tenable.

TEK KNIGHT
But you've been butler to my family for 40 years.

THOMAS
I don't pretend to be happy about this, either. But I have no choice.

The Tek Knight puts a hand on Thomas' shoulder, stopping him.

TEK KNIGHT
I know this is about what happened yesterday...

THOMAS
Master Robert. The relationship between gentleman and manservant is very clear cut. I will serve your meals. I will lay out your clothes. I will put you to bed when you've had too much to drink and I will ensure that discretion prevails in all matters.
(pause)
What I will not do is subject myself to the unspeakable outrage that was committed upon my person last night.

TEK KNIGHT
Thomas. I'm sorry. What else can...

THOMAS
I'm afraid you'll have to speak up. I find myself a little deaf in my left ear.

TEK KNIGHT
Is that the one I...

Thomas stares at the Tek Knight, unable to hide his anger.

THOMAS
Yes. Yes it is.

TEK KNIGHT
I... could pay to have that irrigated.

THOMAS
That won't be necessary.

Thomas grabs his bag, opens the front door.

THOMAS
Good day, sir.

Tek Knight watches his former butler get in a waiting cab and drive off. Frustrated, he slams the door-- the reverberation causes his helmet visor to lower. A final insult.

A pause. Though his face is obscured, we can hear his breath growing more and more shallow. Finally--

TEK KNIGHT
AAAUGGHHHH!!!!!

Tek Knight rips his helmet off, chucking it across the room. A SERIES OF QUICK, CLOSE SHOTS: *Tek Knight, in a rage, rips off his armor piece by piece, hurling it indiscriminately. Paintings fall, vases shatter, bookshelves collapse.*

INT. LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

From behind, we see Tek Knight standing naked in the ruins of his library, trying to catch his breath. His gaze falls on an unbroken vase... its opening so... tempting...

Then-- the doorbell rings. Tek Knight turns, hopeful.

TEK KNIGHT
Thomas?

Grabbing a silk robe, Tek Knight hurries to the door...

FOYER - CONTINUOUS

... but his face drops as he opens it. It's not Thomas-- it's Butcher, with Hughie and Mother's Milk.

BUTCHER
Afternoon, Tek Knight.

TEK KNIGHT
I'm afraid you're mistaken. My name is Robert...

HUGHIE
... Vernon, wealthy industrialist, blah blah blah. Come on man, it's like the worst kept secret ever.

TEK KNIGHT
Is it, now?

BUTCHER
You build a massive hideout beneath your house, you don't think one of those subcontractors is gonna talk?

TEK KNIGHT
Liars. Good day.

He starts to close the door. Mother's Milk catches it.

Tek Knight fights to close the door-- but then notices that Butcher is staring past him... to where his blue Tek helmet is embedded in the wall.

BUTCHER
About those questions, mate...

Tek Knight takes a weak swing at Butcher. Butcher takes it... and sends Tek Knight flying back with a boot to the chest.

Panicked, robe open, Tek Knight scrambles away.

TEK KNIGHT
To the Tek Cave!

HUGHIE
Who is he saying that to?

MOTHER'S MILK
No idea.

LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Tek Knight runs to the smashed bookshelf, pulling at the only remaining volume. The shelf slides back: a HIDDEN STAIRWELL.

HIDDEN STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

With the Boys in pursuit, Tek Knight races down the curving stairwell, toward his secret hideout.

TEK KNIGHT
Activate backup suit!

TEK CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Tek Knight rushes across the Tek Cave, toward where a table is rising out of the floor-- on it lies the BACKUP TEK SUIT.

The table tilts upright to meet him. Tek Knight climbs onto it and the suit automatically FITS ITSELF around him.

TEK KNIGHT'S POV - *the suit comes online. PROXIMITY ALERT. Targeting reticles appear around the Boys' faces as they run toward him. TARGETS ACQUIRED. WEAPONS ACTIVE. But before he can fire, Butcher's FIST fills the screen.*

TEK CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Hughie and Mother's Milk struggle to refasten the solid metal cuffs that secure the Tek Suit to the table. Tek Knight fights against them, but Butcher keeps pounding away.

Finally, the cuffs snap shut and Tek Knight is locked against the upright table like Frankenstein's monster. But he hasn't given up-- HE FIRES HIS WRIST CANNONS.

HUGHIE
OW! Shit!

Hughie is hit in the foot-- strapped in, the Tek Knight can only aim down.

TEK KNIGHT
Thrusters ON!

His jetpack FIRES UP. Flames shoot down his backside.

TEK KNIGHT
AUUGGHHHGH!!!!

HUGHIE
He's going to burn his ass off.

It's true. The cuffs are holding. He going nowhere... just heating himself up.

BUTCHER
The kid's right. You talk, we'll hose you down.

TEK KNIGHT
Go to hell, Butcher.

He fires another futile blast from his wrists.

TEK KNIGHT
You're a glorified soccer hooligan. I am the Tek Knight. My armor cannot be...

He's interrupted by a horrible squeak. Mother's Milk has pried off his breastplate with a crowbar.

TEK KNIGHT
Shit.

Mother's Milk pounds his exposed chest with the crowbar. Through his cracked visor, we see Tek Knight gritting his teeth, refusing to scream. Milk hits him again.

BUTCHER
A couple questions. We just want to know about Sisquatch.

Tek Knight shakes his head. Butcher nods to Milk.

He hits him again. PING! A blur of blue as something flies off Tek Knight's suit, clanging against the far wall-- his CODPIECE. Hughie looks toward Tek's crotch.

HUGHIE
Aw, Christ!

MOTHER'S MILK
That is a powerful erection.

TEK KNIGHT
I have a condition!!!
(near tears)
I don't know why this is happening... if it's some alien virus... maybe when I fought the Zodomite, he zapped me with some..

Butcher looks fed up the histrionics.

BUTCHER
Can we please end this?

TEK KNIGHT
I CAN'T TALK TO YOU!!!

His visor raises. He stares at Butcher, desperate.

TEK KNIGHT
They've got Laddio!

HUGHIE
Your boy side-kick?

TEK KNIGHT
What are you implying?!

BUTCHER
Who's got him?

TEK KNIGHT
The Seven. The Seven took him.

BUTCHER
Now we're getting somewhere.

Tek Knight shakes his head, broken.

TEK KNIGHT
I was supposed to be in the Seven.

BUTCHER
But then they found out you were buggering major appliances.

TEK KNIGHT
I had managed to hide it pretty well... until Mind-Droid. Once that got out, I was toast. They went with blondie. But I had gotten pretty deep by then. Heard things.

BUTCHER
How is Sisquatch involved?

TEK KNIGHT
She was a field test for Vought American. A new form of Compound V... a cheaper, very unstable version, one that doesn't cost 19 billion per dose. V Prime.

HUGHIE
That's why Sisquatch's head exploded?

TEK KNIGHT
You got it.

MOTHER'S MILK
So it's a failure.

TEK KNIGHT
Vought doesn't think so. If you can make heroes by the hundreds, who cares if a few of them blow up.

BUTCHER
How does Vought benefit from a flood of new heroes? Dilutes their product.

TEK KNIGHT
I have no idea, but the Seven were pretty interested in the V Prime project. It's their baby, too.

HUGHIE
So they took Laddio as an insurance policy against you talking.

TEK KNIGHT
They can't kill me. My character is still profitable. But Laddio... I had sent him away, to... avoid temptation. And now they have him.
(pause)
They are obviously up to something. I am powerless to stop them. You have to do something.

EXT. TEK MANOR - LATER

Hughie, Butcher and Mother's Milk walk toward the van.

BUTCHER
If they're building a bunch of supes with this "V Prime," they're gonna need bodies. Where...

HUGHIE
Drug trials.

Butcher and Mother's Milk look to him, eyebrows raised.

HUGHIE
It's how Vought did it last time, no? That's what the Legend said.

BUTCHER
Milk?

MOTHER'S MILK
I'm on it.

They climb in the van, Butcher settling behind the wheel.

BUTCHER
This is what Rayner and the CIA were worried about. Seven and Vought are into something unprecedented. That's why Homelander threw the Kix at us. He wants us to go away.

Butcher looks at Hughie, at Milk. Focused and dead serious.

BUTCHER
But they need to know there's a war waiting for them unless they put the genie back into the bottle. Enough "messages." Now we stick it in their face.

On the sound of the van's engine ROARING away, CUT TO:

INT. BEAT-UP CAR - SAME

A much unhealthier engine. A sour-looking man drives his beater across the Manhattan Bridge. A low-budget radio ad spouts some familiar words:

RADIO AD (O.S.)
Deck stacked against you? Tired of being a victim? When will it be *your* turn?

A MONTAGE:

- The SAME FLYER we've seen all along posted around some of the city's lonelier places: a DRUG CORNER, a carrel in a LIBRARY, trampled on the floor of a BUS. We catch snippets of text, "PAID STUDY... SELF-ESTEEM... MEDICAL TRIAL."

RADIO AD (O.S.)
"...take what you deserve... seize the future... make it yours..."

AROUND THE CITY, we see hands reach for the flyer. Finally...

INT. HALFWAY HOUSE - DAY

A bulletin board in the hallway is crammed with notices for various hotlines and recovery groups. Peeking out from beneath is another copy of the flyer.

A hand reaches out, rips the flyer off the wall. PULL BACK TO REVEAL-- it's Mother's Milk.

EXT. WATERFRONT PARK - DAY

Another flyer, tacked to a tree, flaps in the breeze. A man rips a number from it, and WE FOLLOW HIM INTO THE PARK where--

Members of the SEVEN sit on stage before a large crowd. To the left of them, what looks to be A LARGE VEHICLE sits under a bright red tarp. Balloons and bunting are everywhere.

Annie looks uncomfortable with the proceedings as a Vought pitchman speaks to the excited crowd.

PITCHMAN
...whether they're crossing the Atlantic in pursuit of nuclear pirates or battling time terrorists in the Punishment Dimension...

Black Noir nods toward an empty chair labelled "Queen Maeve."

BLACK NOIR
(mumbled)
...or five martinis deep at the Four Seasons...

PITCHMAN
...the Seven are occasionally unable to respond to crises here at home. As much as they'd like to be, the Seven can't be everywhere at once. Frightening, isn't it? When the back door is left open and danger strikes, who can a scared family call? The police?

A pair of COPS, on hand for crowd control, look annoyed. The pitchman motions to the covered vehicle.

PITCHMAN
Coming soon to a city near you, the Seven Mobile Defense Unit. Or as we here at Vought American like to call it.... EIGHT.

The tarp covering the mystery vehicle drops away, revealing--EIGHT, a sleek, RV-type vehicle emblazoned with the Seven's logo. Though cool for a camper, it's doesn't exactly inspire.

PITCHMAN
I know what you're thinking. How is grandpa's RV going to protect me?
(a canned smile)
Well, think again...

With that, Eight suddenly rears back, twisting and turning in all directions, CHANGING ITSELF from a docile RV into a TEN-FOOT HIGH ROBOT, bristling with weapons and sirens.

EIGHT
HOWDY!

The crowd goes nuts. A barrage of flash bulbs. Parents hoist their delighted kids on their shoulders for a better look. Eight strikes a few more robotic poses. Despite his weaponry, he looks quite friendly.

ONSTAGE, the Seven smile. The Deep turns to Black Noir.

THE DEEP
This thing is going to make us so much damn money.

BLACK NOIR
True dat.

Indeed, MERCH TABLES are already set up with toy "Eights."

PITCHMAN
This mechanical wonder will dispense the Seven-style justice you've come to depend on.
(raising a finger)
But don't worry, this is no mindless robot. It's controlled by good old-fashioned humans. From our remote command center, highly trained Vought specialists can guide Eight with precision into even the most delicate situations.

He gives a final smile before ceding the floor to Eight.

PITCHMAN
Have no fear, the Seven Mobile Defense Unit will...

EIGHT
FUCK YOUR GRANDMA IN THE ASS!

A shocked pause. The crowd's collective jaw drops.

EIGHT
RIGHT IN THE ASS!

Eight raises its arms, exposing two gatling cannons. It whips around like a western gunslinger and FIRES-- a nearby tree is OBLITERATED.

EIGHT
BAMMO!

Pandemonium. Families run for cover, shielding their children. Eight fires another shot. A parked car explodes.

EIGHT
TAKE IT, NANA!!

As Eight pumps rounds into the sky, CUT TO:

INT. VOUGHT REMOTE COMMAND CENTER - SAME

A darkened control room. Among the bound guards and operators is Butcher, who sits before a bank of monitors, at the controls of Eight. He speaks into a mic.

BUTCHER
All. Night. Long!!!!

EXT. WATERFRONT PARK - CONTINUOUS

Finally, Eight lowers its guns, "shoulders" sagging. It looks depressed.

EIGHT
I have... regrets.
(suddenly brightening)
ADIOS, KIDS!

Eight points a ROCKET CANNON under its chin and FIRES, BLOWING ITS OWN HEAD OFF. More screams.

The pitchman rushes toward his car, through throngs of sobbing children. He swats at the table full of toy Eights.

PITCHMAN
Get those things out of here!

As the PRESS CONTINUES TO SNAP AWAY eagerly, WE CLOSE IN ON the one person who hasn't moved this whole time-- the Homelander. A well of fury darkens his face.

ON STARLIGHT/ANNIE: she looks around at the chaos. Ashamed to part of this travesty.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Annie sits alone on a park bench. Everything is the same as last time-- same bench, same fading late afternoon light-- but no Hughie.

After a moment, Annie shakes her head, as if scolding herself for her naivete. She stands to leave-- but has an idea. She takes a pen from her bag, scribbles something on the bench.

As she leaves, we CLOSE IN on the note: "Hughie, I'd like to know more about the little taps. Bar 6, Friday @ 8? -Annie."

We stay on the note as the light fades into night and then slowly back into daytime again.

PULL BACK from the bench to reveal that Hughie is standing in front of it, looking down at the scrawled message.

He smiles.

INT. SEVEN'S HOVERFORT - HALLWAY - DAY

Walking down the hall, A-Train spots Homelander and Queen Maeve in the conference room, in a heated conversation with their Vought Rep.

QUEEN MAEVE
He's obviously onto us.

HOMELANDER
We don't know that.

As he moves to enter the conference room, A-Train is met at the door by The Deep and Black Noir.

BLACK NOIR
Stay out of here.

A-TRAIN
I want to know what's going on.

We see Starlight coming up the hall, curious.

BLACK NOIR
No. Keep the new girl busy. And away from here.

He hits a stud on the wall and the door closes. A-Train sinks back against the wall, pouting, as Starlight approaches.

A-TRAIN
Sorry. They said no sluts allowed in there. I'm guarding.

Refusing to be baited, Starlight gives a perky shrug.

STARLIGHT
Oh well... maybe next time.

She turns and heads down the hallway. A-Train watches her go, his frustration building-- it seems to focus on her ass.

As Starlight passes through a sliding door, A BLUR--

HANGAR - CONTINUOUS

--and suddenly A-Train is standing in front of her.

STARLIGHT
(calm)
A-Train. What are you doing?

A-TRAIN
You know what it's like to bump uglies at Mach 2?

STARLIGHT
I don't understand that sentence.

A-TRAIN
It means you get to do it with me.

STARLIGHT
No thanks.

ANOTHER BLUR-- and suddenly A-Train has her pinned against the wall.

STARLIGHT
A-Train, stop. Get away from me.

A-TRAIN
Don't fight it, honey. It's gonna be good.

STARLIGHT
Are you out of your mind? I'm warning you...

A-TRAIN
You can't stop the... OWWW!!! GOD!!!!

A-Train clutches his eyes and collapses in a heap. And we see that Starlight's entire head is glowing a brilliant orange... as blinding as the sun.

A-TRAIN
AHHHH!!! My eyes! You blinded me, you bitch!

She looks down at him.

STARLIGHT
What is <u>wrong</u> with you?

A-TRAIN
I can do whatever I want. I'm in the Seven.

STARLIGHT
So am I. Try this again, with anyone, and I'll kill you.

She turns. It takes everything in her to bury her hurt and rage. She walks toward the open hangar door and steps over the edge, flying down toward the city.

INT. STOREFRONT - DAY

A makeshift office has been set up in an otherwise ratty storefront. A chipper STAFFER sorts through a stack of forms.

Mother's Milk enters, holding up the flyer we saw earlier.

MOTHER'S MILK
I'd like to take the self-esteem test.

STAFFER
(smiling)
Not a problem.

INT. BAR - LATER

Sitting in a dark, wood-panelled bar, Hughie looks at his watch. Suddenly, someone appears in the door. Annie.

He smiles as she comes up to him.

HUGHIE
Eight o'clock sharp.

To his surprise, she throws her arms around him.

ANNIE
I don't think I can take it. And I don't know anybody here. Anybody except you.

HUGHIE
That's a start, though.

She pulls back and her words stream out.

ANNIE
I used to walk around so positive all the time.
(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)
People probably though I was stupid, or naive, but it's just who I am. I had this faith. My faith. But that's starting to fall apart. And I'm wondering if it was that strong in the first place.

She sits down next to him, takes a deep breath, slowing herself down. He indicates "two drinks" to the bartender.

ANNIE
I've had a good life, Hughie, and I always gave thanks to God for it. I've been telling myself what I'm going through must be a test. A test of my faith...

HUGHIE
Like, uh, Job, or...?

ANNIE
I thought if I just stayed positive, if I believed, I'd pass, and it would all get sorted out. Now that it's gotten so bad, and nothing is changing except *me*, I've started *blaming* God. But... it wasn't his fault.
(pause)
I got myself here. It was my ambition. It was me. It was <u>me</u>.

She drinks. So does he. A quiet pause.

HUGHIE
Well... I don't know what you did that's making you feel this way. And I'm not askin'. None of my business. But I'll tell you this. Last three women but one I knew blamed their problems on everyone *except* themselves.

He looks at her.

HUGHIE
Look, Annie... I don't know what to say about God, or anything like that. I used to think people were looking out for you. You know, gonna take care of you. Come and sort everything out and pat you on the head and fly away. Like our parents used to.

ANNIE
I know.

HUGHIE
But these people that are supposed to take care of us... they don't. They aren't strong enough, or they don't care, or even worse, they're just flat-out bad people. So whether it's them, or God...

ANNIE
We have to take care of ourselves.

HUGHIE
I was gonna say we have to take care of each other.

She takes a breath, nodding, emotion rippling across her face. Moves imperceptibly closer, for a moment, as if she might kiss him. She looks right into his eyes.

ANNIE
You said "but one."

HUGHIE
I did?

ANNIE
"The last three but one." Was the one nice?

He looks down into his beer. Smiles.

HUGHIE
She was lovely.

She nods. Doesn't go any further. A pause until... the bartender comes by, breaking the moment.

BARTENDER
Get you two anything?

Annie looks into her glass.

ANNIE
Can I have one more of these? A Chardonnay? And a shot... a shot of Tequila?

She looks to him: "Good order?" He suppresses a smile.

HUGHIE
Classic combination.

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - SAME

Butcher sits in front of a bank of monitors, watching Sisquatch's death over and over again. Studying it. The squalling of the bagpipes plays over everything. He rewinds again. Watches, the bagpipes providing the soundtrack...

Then, an idea. A smile spreads across his face. CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE BAR - A BIT LATER

Hughie and Annie, a few drinks in, have loosened up quite a bit. Annie, particularly, is a happy drunk.

ANNIE
I love your accent. I love to hear you talk... with your voice.

HUGHIE
Yeah, that's how I like to talk. With my voice.

She summons the bartender.

ANNIE
Another white wine? And... should I put the tequila *in* it? Is that a thing?

HUGHIE
Annie... you *do* drink, don't you?

ANNIE
No! That's the funny deal, mister... I don't!

HUGHIE
What? "Mister"?

He laughs. As does she.

ANNIE
I do not drink!

EXT. THE BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Annie leans on Hughie as he hails a cab. Though her hair is dishevelled, she is relaxed, open in a way we haven't seen.

ANNIE
M'sorry. Really... sorry about...

HUGHIE
You're all right, love, you just aren't used to it.

ANNIE
I just... I really needed this. To be with... someone. Like you.

She pulls him into her, against the cab. She kisses him, whispering.

ANNIE
Come home with me. I want you. I want...

Hughie looks at her, very, very... conflicted.

HUGHIE
Annie. I know what you think you want. But you don't want to decide that in this state, you know?

ANNIE
You are so... nice. Who *are* you?

HUGHIE
Look, if I ever take advantage of you, it'll be because you're drunk *or* vulnerable. Not both.
(pause)
It's just... you make me feel like something good can still happen.

She smiles, moved, and touches his face.

ANNIE
Goodnight, Hughie.

HUGHIE
'Night. Sleep well. Um... take care.

ANNIE
Take care.

She gets in the cab, and it pulls away. We stay with Hughie, smiling through gritted teeth.

HUGHIE
That... was the right thing to do. I am not an asshole. That's important.

He nods, trying to convince himself.

HUGHIE
I am not an asshole.

INT. BOYS HQ - FLATIRON BUILDING - THE NEXT DAY

Butcher and the Boys sit facing Hughie. A silence stretches. He clearly has just finished telling them what happened.

BUTCHER
You're such an asshole.

FRENCHMAN
No, he likes her. He is liking the long-term love.

HUGHIE
Thank you.

FRENCHMAN
Still, I cannot explain your failure to put in.

HUGHIE
I shouldn't have told you guys about this.

FRENCHMAN
No, this is good! Like a slumber party, Hughie! We get closer as friends to hear about the pussy...

Suddenly, a loud, dramatic, CHIMING SOUND. A shadow crosses the room. Floating outside the window is THE DEEP, arms crossed. The Boys all stand to face him.

THE DEEP
He wants to talk. Face to face.

BUTCHER
Good. So do I.

EXT. WINDBLOWN PEAK - DAY

Butcher stands, waiting, framed against the sky. We can't see exactly where he is. Terror, the dog, sits at his feet as he squints into the sun. There is a flash of movement and...

Homelander lands about twenty feet in front of him, impact pulverizing the rock around his feet. He looks around.

HOMELANDER
Why here?

Butcher doesn't respond.

HOMELANDER
Rubbing salt in the wound.

We PULL BACK TO SEE where we are... one of the still-standing stanchions of the destroyed Brooklyn Bridge.

HOMELANDER
We were under the impression that our agreement still held. We have done nothing to break the terms. You however...
(pause)
You killed a minor leaguer. I don't like the precedent, but things happen. Your juvenile stunt with Eight was just that. A stunt to embarrass us, get my attention. But what interests me is why. Why did you come back in the first place?

Butcher just bends down to scratch Terror behind the ears.

HOMELANDER
Planning on saying anything today?

He glances across the stanchion, to where the other members of the Boys stand back, watching.

HOMELANDER
Didn't come alone, I see. Neither did I.

ACROSS THE STANCHION

Beastie, Black Noir, and Queen Maeve vault into view, squaring off against the Boys. Behind them, the Deep rises, arms crossed, majestic.

Frenchman chuckles. All eyes go to him.

FRENCHMAN
Je m'excuse, Le Deep. It's just... you are...

He leans on Hughie, suppressing laughter.

FRENCHMAN
You realize that you have this diving bell on your head?

But Hughie's face is focused on something else-- the Deep has arrived with someone else. A-Train.

ATOP THE STANCHION

Butcher continues to placidly pet Terror as the Homelander paces slowly around him.

HOMELANDER
They aren't necessary. We both know how any physical conflict between us would end.
(pause)
So why would you break our truce? Why risk it? I know it isn't *duty*.

He bends down to a crouch, so that he can meet Butcher's unwavering stare.

HOMELANDER
I can hear your heart rate, you know. You can keep your face perfectly still, but you can't stop your heart from pounding. And it is. Not from fear... I'd be able to smell that. Anger. Hatred.
(pause)
Why do you hate me so much? I don't mean what is your general problem with superhumans. I mean <u>why</u> do you hate <u>me</u>? What did I do to you? Or... *someone close to you*.

While Butcher doesn't seem to react, Homelander has seen something. He smiles.

HOMELANDER
Now we're getting somewhere.

ACROSS THE STANCHION

Mother's Milk notices the murderous gaze on Hughie's face as he stares at the oblivious A-Train. Hughie's body is tense, as though he's about to attack.

MOTHER'S MILK
Hughie. Be smart.

ATOP THE STANCHION

HOMELANDER
So. I killed them, whoever they were. Obviously. Was it here? On that day? Hot or cold?

He looks at Butcher, shaking his head.

HOMELANDER
Cold. A friend? A comrade in arms who took a bullet for you... hot or cold? Cold. Very cold. I think...
(pause)
There is something *irreversible* about you. You don't expect to come out the other side of this. You don't expect to win and then walk away, to...

He stops himself.

HOMELANDER
Wife.
(smile spreading)
Hot.

Finally, Butcher speaks.

BUTCHER
Bottom line.

HOMELANDER
Stay out of our way. Hold up your end of the bargain. You've had dirt on us for years, and that's why you live. But that information is only worth so much. In a stand up fight with us, you die.
(pause)
You are completely alone. <u>We</u> are the heroes.

They stare at each other for a moment.

HOMELANDER
What's your *bottom line*?

BUTCHER
You're out of control. I won't allow it.
(pause)
Eight was to get you face to face. So you can *see* my face when I tell you this-- we're here to <u>avoid</u> a war. That's up to you, because if you go through with whatever you're planning, I will kill you.

Homelander just smiles at him, the picture of haughty arrogance. Butcher turns and starts to walk away.

Only now does his control break down enough for us to see what the Homelander has seen. The naked rage.

ACROSS THE STANCHION

Mother's Milk watches Butcher walk toward the team.

BLACK NOIR
That's all, then.

MOTHER'S MILK
That's all.
(to Hughie)
That's all.

Then Hughie's eye is drawn to the sky. A streak of light coming toward them... very, very fast.

It lands-- it's Starlight.

BLACK NOIR
Starlight, what the hell?

QUEEN MAEVE
You were told to stay away..

STARLIGHT
I'm part of this team. I'm not sitting on the sidelines while you...

And then she sees Hughie.

STARLIGHT
...you... *Hughie*...

She's masked, but the sound of her voice, seeing her this close... it's unmistakable. <u>Starlight is Annie.</u>

She and Hughie look at each other, stunned.

BLACK NOIR
While we *what*?

She doesn't answer him, still looking at Hughie. Black Noir scoffs at her, mumbling something obscene.

CLOSE ON HUGHIE as he stares at Annie, betrayed. She is standing right next to the A-Train. They are <u>teammates</u>.

<u>She's one of them</u>. The lines are suddenly very clear.

MOTHER'S MILK (V.O.)
What the hell was that?

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - LATER

Butcher and Mother's Milk berate Hughie, while Frenchman and the Female put their surveillance gear together.

BUTCHER
How many times have you seen her?!

HUGHIE
Just once. Twice, kinda.

BUTCHER
Jesus Christ! She's playing you!

MOTHER'S MILK
You gotta be smarter than that, brother.

HUGHIE
It wasn't like that.

BUTCHER
Of course, it was *like that*! She's in the Seven. She was working you for information. Get your head out of your ass! How much did you compromise us? How much did you tell her?

HUGHIE
Nothing! I told her nothing!
(standing)
You think I wanted this? To see her standing there next to the fucking A-Train? This girl who I... who...

Hughie kicks his chair. Steaming, Butcher heads to the door.

BUTCHER
Amateur hour. Anybody who wants to work, anybody who wants to <u>stop</u> the Seven instead of holding their hand, come with me.

Butcher leaves, slamming the door. Hughie shakes his head, looks up: all of the other Boys are looking at him.

INT. THE SEVEN'S HOVERFORT - CONTROL ROOM- NIGHT

Homelander stands behind Annie as she watches the Seven's DOSSIER ON THE BOYS displayed on various video screens: graphic, bloody images of their prior exploits... of their battles against the heroes... a violent, one-sided account.

HOMELANDER
Let me guess. You met him by chance. He made you feel understood. Comfortable enough to open up.

ANNIE
Yes.

Annie stares at the image of the dead body of Sorcerous.

HOMELANDER
The second he had the chance, *that* would have been you. This is what they do. This is who he is.

The humiliation and betrayal she feels is written on her face.

HOMELANDER
You never need to question who the good guys are, Annie.

EXT. WAREHOUSE DISTRICT - NEWARK - DAY

Block after block of abandoned warehouses and factories gone to seed. Descending on this blighted sprawl, we find the Boys' van parked in an alley.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Butcher, Hughie and company are crowded toward the front of the van with an array of cameras and binoculars.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD, they watch a warehouse complex. Unlike the rest of the neighborhood, this place is pristine... and surrounded by a shiny barbed-wire fence.

FRENCHMAN
A strange place for a drug trial...

BUTCHER
Cheap real estate out here. Besides, exploding heads tend to rattle the neighbors.
(to himself)
What does the Seven want here?

Frenchman is leafing through a questionnaire, the cover of which resembles the <u>FLYER</u>. It's entitled "SELF-ESTEEM TEST."

FRENCHMAN
They seem to want sociopaths. Look at these questions...

MOTHER'S MILK
I just thought to myself, how would Butcher answer this... and I passed with flying colors.
(shrugs)
This is the address they gave me.

BUTCHER
Sunshine Holistics my ass...

Butcher looks at Hughie, who still looks distracted.

BUTCHER
You with us? You here?

HUGHIE
I'm here. I'm just...
(pause)
Disappointed, all right?

FRENCHMAN
When we find out our dream girl is a Judas spy on us, yes, we are sad.

ACROSS THE STREET, a door to the complex opens and a group of men exit, a few in suits, others in lab coats. One of the suited EXECUTIVES has a briefcase hand-cuffed to his wrist.

BUTCHER
Well, now...

The executive shakes hands with other men and hops into a black SUV that drives up to meet him.

BUTCHER
Our fun just doubled, mates.
(turns to the Frenchman)
Take wee little Hughie across the street, find out what's inside.

FRENCHMAN
Oui, monsieur. Come, Petit Hughie.

Frenchman opens the door and follows Hughie out. Butcher turns to the others.

BUTCHER
Let's go get the football.

The engine roars to life and the van ZOOMS AWAY.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Keeping low and out of sight, Hughie and the Frenchman peer across the street toward Vought's warehouse complex.

HUGHIE
I spot three in the guard house.

FRENCHMAN
Oui. That is my count as well.

HUGHIE
So. I say we create some kind of distraction to lure them out. While they're dealing with it, we go over the fence on the east side, using our coats to cover the razor wire.

The Frenchman nods, listening carefully.

FRENCHMAN
Yes, yes... okay. If I may offer one suggestion?

HUGHIE
Of course.

FRENCHMAN
We should not do your plan. It is terrible and will get us killed.

HUGHIE
It's not a bad...

FRENCHMAN
Do not be embarrassed Hughie. I am your friend. It was a noble effort. But we will go in the front.

The Frenchman stands, claps Hughie on the shoulder, and walks right across the street toward the complex.

HUGHIE
Oh God...

We watch with Hughie as the Frenchman marches happily up to the guardhouse, whistling as he goes.

FRENCHMAN
Bonjour!

The Frenchman enters the guard house. We see only flashes of movement through the window-- an extremely one-sided fight.

And suddenly the GATE SLIDES OPEN. The Frenchmen emerges, chipper as ever. He beckons Hughie inside.

INT. VAN - SAME

On the radio, the Seals & Croft AM classic "Summer Breeze" incongruously plays as Butcher races to catch up with the SUV, which is about a block ahead of them. Suddenly, he cuts left down a side street, flooring it.

They reach the end of the block in seconds and Butcher makes a hard right-- the van is now running parallel to the SUV.

"Summer Breeze" plays on... and we notice the Female quietly humming along. It's the first peep we've ever heard from her.

Butcher, surprised, glances to Mother's Milk, who shrugs.

EXT. WAREHOUSE COMPLEX - SAME

Through a small window, we see a long white hallway. MEN IN LAB COATS occasionally cross back and forth.

PULL BACK TO SEE: Frenchman is using his goggle as a mirror to peer through the tiny window in the door.

FRENCHMAN
There are quite a few men inside.

HUGHIE
So we should just rip this door off and barge in, right?

FRENCHMAN
(ignoring the sarcasm)
No. Now we do the stealth.

They move around to the back of the building, to a steel fire escape ladder. As the Frenchman climbs it, Hughie follows-- catching a glimpse into the building through a narrow window.

INSIDE, a man sits on an examination table. A DOCTOR is injecting him with a light blue substance. <u>V PRIME</u>.

As Hughie makes his way up to the roof, CUT BACK TO:

INT. VAN - SAME

As the van races along, Butcher and Mother's Milk nod in time to "Summer Breeze" (and the Female's quiet humming).

RADIO (O.S.)
... blowin' through the jasmine of my mind...

DOWN EVERY SIDE STREET, we catch flashes of the SUV. The Boys are keeping pace.

EXT. ROOF - SAME

Hughie and the Frenchman move across the roof.

FRENCHMAN
You know, I would not worry about this Annie. I always pictured you with a brunette. Elegant features. Not this corn-eating farm girl USA.

HUGHIE
Um... thanks.

As they approach a bank of windows, a LOW RUMBLING SOUND becomes audible. Hughie tilts open one of the massive windows, and a CACOPHONY OF VOICES washes over them.

Without hesitation, the Frenchman leaps through the window.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hughie and Frenchman drop in behind some shipping containers. The voices are almost deafening, like a packed convention.

Carefully, they move through a gap between containers. As Hughie emerges into the warehouse, his jaw drops--

HUGHIE
Good Christ...

<u>It's a warehouse full of SUPERHEROES</u>. Or, from the looks of them, <u>SUPERVILLAINS</u>.

EXT. INTERSECTION - SAME

The SUV stops at a red light. To the left, the Boys' van SCREECHES around the corner, GUNNING toward the intersection.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

"Summer Breeze" reaches its crescendo as the van bounds across the sidewalk, right toward the SUV. Butcher smiles.

BUTCHER
Great fucking song...

EXT. INTERSECTION - CONTINUOUS

The van PLOWS right into the SUV, rolling it upside down. The Boys are out of the van before the dust settles.

Mother's Milk checks the driver-- he's out.

A GROAN-- the bloodied executive claws out from beneath the totalled SUV and tries to crawl away, the briefcase still handcuffed to him.

Butcher shoves him back against the vehicle with his boot.

BUTCHER
Open the case.

The executive reaches for a gun-- which Mother's Milk easily snatches from him. The Female moves in, but Butcher holds up a hand, stopping her.

Butcher takes a knee, leans in close to the exec.

BUTCHER
Listen to me. If you like the way you look, if you like having eyes, or... a face, you'll open that attache. Now.

The exec looks at the Female... and wisely dials the combination on the locks. He opens the case to reveal--

A COMIC BOOK. Actually, a mock-up of one-- pencil drawings of an entire story, mounted on a stack of matte boards.

Butcher quickly leafs through them, eyes brightening.

BUTCHER
Well, look at that...
(passing them to Milk)
Get some snaps.

MOTHER'S MILK
Done.

Butcher turns back to the exec.

BUTCHER
Now, you've got two choices, mate. You can talk, and be the man who lost this information to the Boys.
(MORE)

BUTCHER (CONT'D)
I think we both know where that gets you... it's bleak, brother.

Snapping away with the camera, Mother's Milk seems stunned by the boards he's photographing.

MOTHER'S MILK
Jesus...

BUTCHER
(continuing)
Or... you can be the heroic survivor of a hit and run accident. The man who wouldn't let go of the briefcase, even in the ambulance.

Butcher takes the boards back and replaces them in the briefcase, snapping it shut and wiping his prints away.

BUTCHER
(a smile)
Personally, I think it's better for you that this never happened.

In the distance, sirens can be heard. Butcher catches sight of something else in the SUV: a splayed-open case of VIALS OF LIGHT BLUE LIQUID. He snags several, and smashes the rest.

As the sirens get louder, he motions to the Boys. Time to go.

INT. WAREHOUSE - SAME

The Frenchman and Hughie wade into the teeming mass of supes, all of whom wear or are being fitted for the same BLUE-ON-BLACK UNIFORM. Costumes aside, they look... off. Degenerate.

Because not all have unis yet, Hughie and Frenchman go unnoticed in the crowd, who are all just killing time: smoking, getting in fights with each other, watching giant plasma screens. The place is like a big holding pen.

Hughie and Frenchman spot a commotion up ahead. A group of SUPES is accosting a Vought EXEC.

TWITCHY SUPE
But how much *longer*?

EXEC
Soon. I promise you, soon.

TWITCHY SUPE
We're ready to tear some shit up!

General agreement from the gathered supes. The exec nods.

EXEC
Yes, I'm aware of that. But you're going to have to be patient.

SUPE #2
Do you have any idea how boring it is here?

EXEC
Do *you* have any idea how much money is accruing in your bank account?

TWITCHY SUPE
I'm telling you, suit. I'm about to go off.

EXEC
NO! You'll wait for your orders. And you'll shut the hell up.

Hughie nods to the Frenchman-- let's get out of here.

The two of them head back the way they came. As the Frenchmen disappears between the containers, a VOICE behind Hughie.

VOICE (O.S.)
Newbie alert!

Hughie turns. He's surrounded a cluster of UNIFORMED SUPES. The biggest one smiles at him.

SMILEY SUPE
And who do we have here?

SUPE #4
I've never seen him.

SUPE #5
Doesn't even have a costume.

SUPE #4
Maybe we should... bang him?

SMILEY SUPE
Great call.

As the Smiley Supe reaches toward Hughie, a HAND grabs hold of his wrist, squeezing it, crushing it. Groaning in pain, the supe turns to see-- the Frenchman.

FRENCHMAN
This newbie belongs to me.

The would-be supes back off. Hughie and the Frenchman head the other direction.

HUGHIE
They're building a freakin' army.

FRENCHMAN
Oui. And of course, the question is, for what?

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON: A COMIC BOOK PANEL

PRESIDENT CLEVELAND, standing at a podium in front of the New York Public Library, waving to the masses.

The panel FLIPS like the page of a book, revealing another: *The president looks to the sky in terror. A dialogue bubble:*

PRESIDENT
My God...

Next drawing: *A HORDE OF SUPERVILLAINS rockets from the sky, wearing the blue-on-black uniforms we saw in the warehouse.*

These are the storyboards that Butcher intercepted. One by one, the panels flip past, sketching out a shocking story:

- The army of villains descends upon the crowd, attacking.

- The Secret Service shields the president, firing at the invaders. But it's no use...

- A blast of energy from the lead villain obliterates the podium, killing the president and those around him.

- A terrifying wave of death and destruction as the attack spreads across the city. Chaos in the streets.

- Then... hope. Like angels sent from heaven, The Seven swoop down to save New York.

- A fierce battle rages. The Seven heroically beat back the attackers. As the Homelander brutally smites one of them:

HOMELANDER
That's for the President!

- The last villain takes aim at a group of children. As he fires-- STARLIGHT FLIES IN FRONT OF THEM, taking the blow.

- Seconds too late, A-Train rushes to her side. She's dead.

A-TRAIN
Starlight!!!! Whyyyyyyyy!!!!

- Peace restored, The Seven, now six, stand over their fallen comrade.

- Another funeral. The newly sworn in President Bass lays a wreath at his predecessor's grave. Another eternal flame.

- The new president addresses the nation from the steps of the White House. Standing defiantly behind him: the Seven. The nation's protectors.

On this final board, a Vought stamp. "Approved." Handwritten across the last panel are two words: "THIS WORKS."

HUGHIE (O.S.)
Jesus Christ...

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - DAY

The Boys stare at the pictures scattered on the table.

BUTCHER
Quite a plan, eh?

MOTHER'S MILK
An attack that only the Seven can handle.

BUTCHER
Great P.R. when you're looking to get into national defense. And look who becomes President.

MOTHER'S MILK
Vic the Veep. Friend of the supes. Vought patsy.

BUTCHER
(looks around the room)
President is in town this Friday. Any questions on what our mission is now?

It's clear as a bell, but Hughie states it anyway... he's in shock, staring at the image of Starlight's death. Annie's death.

HUGHIE
Stop it. We have to stop it.

They all look at him.

BUTCHER
Sure. We can stop it. Foil Vought's plan. This time.
(pause)
Or... we end this once and for all.

A long pause. They realize what he's talking about.

MOTHER'S MILK
We take out the Seven.

A silence as this settles in. Butcher looks to Hughie.

BUTCHER
All of 'em.

Hughie doesn't look away. The silence sits heavily.

FRENCHMAN
Mon Dieu. It's suicide, Butcher.

BUTCHER
Milk. We need you at full strength. You need to see her. You need to juice up.

MOTHER'S MILK
I know.

BUTCHER
Hughie. You come with me.

EXT. THE FRONT STEPS - DAY

Butcher sits on the steps in front of the building, looking out at the passing people. Hughie comes out of the building, sits down next to him. After a moment...

HUGHIE
What do you want from me, Butcher?

BUTCHER
You wanted to know why I do this. You wanted to know why I'm here. That's fair enough. Especially with what we're about to do.

A long pause.

BUTCHER
It's about Homelander.
(pause)
He raped my wife.

HUGHIE
Jesus.

Butcher speaks levelly, looking straight ahead.

BUTCHER
She never told me. Shame or something. I read it in her diary afterwards. First I knew about it, I wake up and there's blood everywhere and there's this *thing*... a supe as powerful as Homelander can't reproduce with a normal woman. What it made... was a monster.

He spits on the ground, as if trying to get the taste of the words out of his mouth.

BUTCHER
Which clawed its way out when it was good and ready.

He pulls up the sleeve of his jacket to reveal a criss-crossing web of scar tissue.

BUTCHER
See that? It was the heat vision done that. Before I could kill the thing with the nightstand.

HUGHIE
I... don't know what to say.

BUTCHER
I loved Becky. She was what I believed in, right? So...
(pause)
There's nothing left. There's pints and a job well done and that doesn't even start to cover it. So I'll have him. That's all there is.

Hughie turns this over for a second, looks at Butcher.

HUGHIE
I keep thinking I'm doing this for Robin. That I have to get revenge, 'cause that's what I've been taught all this time.... but *revenge* won't do shit, will it?
(pause)
That's the big secret isn't it? It doesn't help a bit.

BUTCHER
That's why I'm offering you a way out.

HUGHIE
You want me to quit?

BUTCHER
I got you into this because I thought you were like me. But you're a good guy, Hughie. That's the beginning and the end of it. After all the shit that happened to you, that's still what you are. It didn't break you. There's no out for me. There's no end. But there is for you.

HUGHIE
I can't leave now.

BUTCHER
Why stay? Why?

HUGHIE
For you lot.

Butcher looks at him for a second. Then he nods.

BUTCHER
There's a very good chance we aren't going to come out of this.

HUGHIE
I know.

BUTCHER
Plans go to shit the second we hit the ground. And if we can't make it an unfair fight... we're dead in less than a minute, and the world remembers us as villains.
(pause)
When we get in there, I can't guarantee what'll happen. I know what you think of that Annie, but she's one of them and I will not treat her any differently. There's no room for the fine points when we get into it with them.

HUGHIE
I know.

Butcher clasps Hughie on the shoulder as the two men stare straight ahead.

BUTCHER
Fucking hell, mate. Fucking hell.

We fade into a MONTAGE.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - SUNSET

Hughie stares at the bench where he and Annie first met.

Above, the Seven's fortress is visible through the clouds. Hughie stares up it, conflict clouding his face.

INT. CHURCH - SAME

Alone in a beautiful old church, Annie prays. She looks lost.

EXT. ROW HOUSE - QUEENS - SAME

Mother's Milk climbs the front steps of a typical brick row house. He opens the door with trepidation.

MOTHER'S MILK
Momma?

EXT. CEMETERY - SAME

Butcher stares quietly down at the grave in front of him. The modest headstone reads "Rebecca Butcher."

EXT. HOVER FORTRESS - HELIPAD - SAME

CLOSE ON the Homelander, framed by the orange and rose colored clouds of the sunset. The wind ripples his cape as he gazes imperiously down at the city below.

INT. RAYNER'S OFFICE - SAME

CIA Director Susan Rayner walks toward her fax machine. An incoming transmission from Butcher spills paper onto the floor. She picks up a page off the carpet, looking at it. It's from the comic book mockup of the attack.

RAYNER
Jesus.

INT. ROW HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mother's Milk opens a door, staring down into the forboding darkness of the basement.

MOTHER'S MILK
Momma? It's me...

INT. FLATIRON BUILDING - SAME

The Frenchman and the Female silently play some sort of hybrid of chess and checkers using pieces from different board games. Somehow it makes sense to them.

The Female stares across the board at the very pensive Frenchman. Catching her looking, he smiles.

FRENCHMAN
We will be just fine.

Her expression doesn't change.

FRENCHMAN
Well, we will be together, no? This is what matters.

EXT. HOVER FORTRESS - HELIPAD - SUNSET

The Homelander smiles, gazing into the sunset. After a moment: a prostitute rises up into frame. We realize she has been down there the whole time.

HOMELANDER
Find another way back down...
I've got a big day tomorrow.

EXT. ROW HOUSE - SAME

Mother's Milk exits the house, looking heartier, but shaken. He wipes his mouth, gets into a CAR where Butcher is waiting.

BUTCHER
You okay?

Mother's Milk promptly vomits out the window. Butcher starts the car, handing Mother's Milk a metal briefcase. As they drive off--

BUTCHER (O.S.)
Been thinking about those bagpipes...

FADE OUT.

EXT. QUEENSBOROUGH BRIDGE - DAY

A sea of red and blue flashing lights as the PRESIDENT'S MOTORCADE is escorted across the bridge into Manhattan.

RADIO (O.S.)
... as President Cleveland returns to New York to unveil his education reform plan...

EXT. EAST 34TH STREET HELIPORT - DAY

The Boys walk out to an unmarked but armed military helicopter. Its rotors whir to life as they approach.

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - SAME

The President arrives to raucous cheers. He steps to the podium with a smile, waving to the assembled crowd. The scene bears an eerie resemblance to the comic we saw earlier.

INT. VICE PRESIDENTIAL MANSION - SAME

The Vice President watches as, ON THE TV, the President waves to the crowd. The Veep is a bit sweaty and anxious.

INT. WAREHOUSE - SAME

The army of villains are dressed and ready. They ooze aggression, shaking with pent up energy... dying for action.

VILLAIN
Come on... come on! Let's do this!

EXEC
As soon as we get the order, you...

The 'roided-out villain HOWLS and HURLS HIM AND HIS ASSISTANT all the way across the room, where they hit the far wall.

EXEC #2
Calm down! Think about the bonus!

INT. HELICOPTER - SAME

The pensive Boys sit in the helicopter as it chops through the air. Each is in their own world.

HUGHIE
We have a plan, right? We *do* have a plan?

BUTCHER
Yeah, we have a plan.

He holds out a device-- a compact trigger mechanism with a BUTTON on the top.

BUTCHER
The bagpipe frequency. We think that's what set off the unstable V-Prime in Sisquatch.

HUGHIE
We think?

MOTHER'S MILK
It kind of makes sense.

Butcher opens a case, pulling out several silver INJECTOR GUNS and bullet-shaped DOSE CAPSULES.

BUTCHER
So we jab 'em with the V Prime... which will unfortunately make them stronger...

HUGHIE
Great.

BUTCHER
... and hope one of us stays alive long enough to press this button.

FRENCHMAN
It could be you, Hughie!

The helicopter flies on.

FRENCHMAN
It could be you.

INT. HOVERFORT OF THE SEVEN - ANNIE'S ROOM - DAY

Annie puts her new, much sexier uniform on, looking at herself in the mirror. Staring at who she needs to become.

Then: an ALARM BLARES and an electronically-tinged voice calls out.

VOICE (O.S.)
Assemble! Assemble! The President is in imminent danger! Assemble!

INT. HOVERFORT OF THE SEVEN - MAIN BAY - SAME

The alarm echoes in the bay, where the others have gathered.

BLACK NOIR
Someone shut that bullshit off.

QUEEN MAEVE
She needs to hear it, asshole.

BLACK NOIR
I will miss her. Nice ass.

HOMELANDER
We get this right. We go by the playbook.

A-TRAIN
Yeah! Let's save the world, bro!

BLACK NOIR
Idiot.

Homelander walks up and down the line, looking at his troops.

HOMELANDER
Don't limit the collateral damage. It has to be memorable. It has...

And then a MASSIVE EXPLOSION rips through the bay.

We see nothing but smoke and dust.

The sound of coughing and some groans of pain as the dust and smoke begins to clear. The members of the Seven stagger to their feet behind the Homelander... who is unmoved.

Through the dust we see THE BOYS, helicopter peeling away behind them.

A smile curls across Homelander's face.

HOMELANDER
Here?

BUTCHER
Right here. We know where you're going. You'll never get there.

HOMELANDER
You're going to throw your little bodies in front of us *now*? When we're about to save the President?

Butcher laughs, holds up one of the COMIC PAGES.

BUTCHER
Don't like this story.

ON HUGHIE, scanning the Seven: Starlight isn't there.

BUTCHER
Boys?

The Seven leap into the air or into fighting stance.

HOMELANDER
History's going to tell the truth about you.

We move across the faces of the Boys. Quietly:

MOTHER'S MILK
Good luck, Hughie.

BUTCHER
Go.

As one, they RACE FORWARD, and we are RACING ALONGSIDE THEM as they charge into the line, Butcher toward Black Noir, Mother's Milk toward Queen Maeve...

Frenchman lopes ahead of the pack, LEAPING as Professor Bestor, alter-ego of Beastie, winds up to shout his transforming catchphrase...

BEASTIE
LET'S GET LAR...

But Frenchman punches him in the throat before he can get it out.

BEASTIE
Glllll... Gllllllllk...

The Prof falls to the ground, unchanged. Frenchman leaps on him and INJECTS HIM WITH THE DRUG GUN just before...

He is BLASTED out of frame by Homelander's HEAT VISION.

Homelander snaps his head, following the smoldering Frenchman as he crumples against a bulkhead. Homelander's eyes GLOW RED to blast Frenchman again... but with a SHRIEK, THE FEMALE leaps onto him and JABS HER THUMBS INTO HIS EYES.

He roars in pain and TAKES OFF, Female clinging to his back.

FROM ABOVE

The Homelander rockets up toward us. He blasts THROUGH THE ROOF, thrashing in pain and rage, shedding the Female, who falls all the way back down to the floor.

Hughie looks up, avoiding hunks of falling debris that rain down from the Homelander's exit, sunlight streaming in.

ON MOTHER'S MILK: as he squares off with Queen Maeve.

MOTHER'S MILK
We don't do that chick-has-to-fight-the-other-chick mess.

QUEEN MAEVE
You face the Vorpal Sword of the Nygaarden, fool.

MOTHER'S MILK
You face a pipe.

He SMASHES her on the head, knocking off her helmet.

MOTHER'S MILK
Just...

He swings again and again, Maeve deflecting the blows with her gauntlets.

MOTHER'S MILK
...a... regular... motherfucking...

He rears back, swinging mightily.

MOTHER'S MILK
... pipe.

As she ducks the blow, he JABS HER in the side, beneath her armor, with the DRUG INJECTOR he holds in his other hand.

She viciously SLASHES Mother's Milk with an uppercut from her sword. He staggers back, wounded. Queen Maeve grabs her side, curious... but unaffected.

She raises the sword to attack again... but Black Noir PLOWS THROUGH HER, wrapped up in his battle with Butcher.

Black Noir is a snarling whirlwind, pummelling Butcher with attack after attack. Butcher keeps his arms up in front of his face like a boxer, absorbing the punishment.

An overhead punch knocks Butcher to his knees. Black Noir winds up for a fatal punch, bringing his fist down on...

The INJECTOR, which Butcher has produced. Black Noir SCREAMS IN PAIN.

Butcher KICKS him away and, bloodied, stands up.

BUTCHER
You lot need to learn that fighting's about <u>taking</u> the punch.

Black Noir punches Butcher, who flies across the room.

On the floor behind him, the Professor SHAKES WITH NEW POWER, but still unable to speak and turn into Beastie...

The Deep RISES UP behind Butcher.

THE DEEP
Witness the rise of the son of Atlantis!

That statement aside, it is unclear what exactly he plans to do. The Frenchman moves into position.

FRENCHMAN
What do you *do*? Really.

The Deep FLEXES, and a MASSIVE SHOCKWAVE of energy emits from him, slamming the Frenchman to the ground.

THE DEEP
I call upon the spirit of the Tsunami!

FRENCHMAN
Oh, shit.

He LEAPS ONTO the Deep, holding him tightly as another shockwave erupts, STAGGERING EVERYONE IN THE BAY.

FRENCHMAN
I admit. I have underestimate.

Frenchman opens the faceplate of the Deep's diving bell and INJECTS him in the forehead.

ON HUGHIE: who seems stunned by the ferocity of the combat.

WE ARE IN HIS POV: *everything is slowing down... the Female trying to get to her feet... Butcher charging Black Noir... chaos swirling around him. And then he sees...*

Starlight. Annie.

She has just arrived. She looks around at the fight, meeting eyes with Hughie.

They stare at each other.

Then her gaze shifts toward the onrushing FEMALE. She BLASTS the Female with sizzling light, the Female CRIES OUT IN PAIN but rakes Starlight across the neck. Blood spurts.

HUGHIE
No! Female, no!

BUTCHER
FUCK'S SAKE, HUGHIE!

Hughie takes an instinctive step toward them, but a blur RACES AROUND THE OUTSIDE WALL, smashing Hughie out of frame.

It's A-TRAIN. He rains lightning-fast punches onto Hughie. Face-to-face with his enemy for the first time, Hughie's face clouds with rage and he HEAD-BUTTS him. A-Train staggers back into the Butcher, who holds him as Hughie crawls forward, dazed, and INJECTS HIM.

Butcher glances up-- sees Starlight blast the Female at close range, then turn, about to fire again. He shouts to his men.

BUTCHER
Stay close to them! Get in their shirts!

He yanks A-Train in front of him as Starlight fires a GLITTERING RAY that looks like thousands of diamond shards. A-Train takes the brunt.

A-TRAIN
Watch your fire, bitch!

Starlight turns toward Mother's Milk, firing a ray of light that seems to paralyze him, dragging him to the ground. While she is distracted, Hughie RUNS FOR HER.

On the floor, the Prof struggles up to one knee. Croaks out..

PROFESSOR BESTOR
Lets... get...

Racing by, the Frenchman roundhouse-kicks his throat.

PROFESSOR BESTOR
Acck...

Hughie LEAPS ONTO Annie, wrestling her to the ground. He holds the INJECTOR gun to her neck. Can't pull the trigger.

STARLIGHT
Hughie! What are you doing?

HUGHIE
Listen to me...

STARLIGHT
We're trying to save...

HUGHIE
It's a lie! They want to...

STARLIGHT
Everybody lies! You lied!

HUGHIE
No, they want to kill you. They're going to kill you...

She BLASTS HIM off of her, across the floor.

STARLIGHT
I don't know who you are! They are the Seven! WE are the Seven!

Sensing something, she turns... grabbing Frenchman's wrist as he tries to inject her. She shatters the gun, but Frenchman flips her to the ground.

FRENCHMAN
Hughie! Gun!

Across the floor, Hughie grabs his injector gun, fumbling with it. He holds it. Hesitating.

FRENCHMAN
NOW!

Pained look on his face, Hughie slides it across the floor to the Frenchman. As Hughie watches, he injects her, before she blasts him toward the rest of the Boys.

They stagger together and form up, back to back.

BUTCHER
One more! One...

Black Noir, Queen Maeve, A-Train and The Deep get in front of the still struggling Professor and Starlight. They look immensely powerful.

BLACK NOIR
You made us stronger.

BUTCHER
Honest mistake.

QUEEN MAEVE
Masochists.

BLACK NOIR
Perverse.

Butcher smiles, in pain, blood on his teeth.

BUTCHER
Now the hard part.

Across the room, the Professor, pulsing with his new power, finally bellows...

BEASTIE
LET'S GET LARGE GOD DAMMIT!

... and transforms into the hulking BEASTIE. He rips an equipment locker off the wall and chucks it at the Frenchman.

BEASTIE
BEASTIE ANGRY!

AND THEN A SHOUT OF INSANE INTENSITY SHAKES EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE IN THE ROOM.

HOMELANDER (O.S.)
Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhh!!!

Like a bolt of lightning, the Homelander returns, landing on the deck, denting it. Blood trickles from his eye sockets.

Butcher stands tall, if a bit wobbly. He holds an injector in one hand, palms THE BUTTON in the other.

BUTCHER
Come and get me.

As Homelander steps toward him, *everything slows down, as if in a dream*. The Female charges. Homelander scoops her up and slams her to the floor like a rag doll.

Frenchman slides toward him, kicking at his knee. Homelander kicks him, Frenchman's body crumpling around his foot.

The Female tries to crawl to Frenchman's unmoving body, but Queen Maeve lifts her sword and DRIVES IT THROUGH the Female's back... pinning her to the deck. She twists the sword in the wound.

Still coming, Homelander punches Mother's Milk, who crumples to the ground like a sack of rocks. Beastie picks Milk up and drops him, back-breaker style, onto his knee.

Hughie leaps at Homelander, who effortlessly throws him into a wall. He has only one target in mind.

And then, Homelander crashes into Butcher.

Butcher JAMS THE INJECTOR under Homelander's square jaw, DOSING HIM. Homelander just smiles and breaks Butcher's arm.

Butcher grimaces as the Homelander breaks his other arm.

And the TRIGGER BUTTON falls to the ground and rolls away.

Butcher looks at it helplessly. The Homelander plants a foot on the side of Butcher's head, ready to crush it.

Hughie is the only one close enough to get to the button. In pain, he scrambles across the ground for it, ducking as A-Train dives over him... reaching out...

And the button ZIPS AWAY FROM HIM. He turns his head to see that Starlight has enmeshed it in a glittering yellow TRACTOR BEAM and pulled it to her.

She holds it, looking at the Seven as they prepare to end it.

STARLIGHT'S POV:

Mother's Milk is unconscious, possibly dead.

The Frenchman holds the Female protectively in his arms, trying to pull the sword out, as Maeve and Black Noir kick him mercilessly, like thugs.

Homelander stands over Butcher, imperious.

And A-Train is throttling the life out of Hughie.

ON HUGHIE:

From the ground, he hits the A-Train with all he's got...

HUGHIE
Aaaaaarhhh!

... but the A-Train is much stronger than Sorcerous was. A-Train's grip tightens around his throat. This is the one Hughie hates above all others. And there's absolutely nothing he can do about.

Hughie closes his eyes, delirious, near death.

HUGHIE
I tried...

A-TRAIN
Yeah! Fuck yeah!

HUGHIE
... I tried, Robin.

ON STARLIGHT:

She looks at her raging teammates, their animal-like brutality. She puts hand to her neck where she was injected. Looks at the button-device. Understanding.

STARLIGHT
Oh.

She looks at Hughie, legs struggling. Going still.

ON BUTCHER:

His face defeated, but forever defiant.

BUTCHER
Her name was Becky.

HOMELANDER
What?

BUTCHER
Becky.

HOMELANDER
I don't give a f...

SUDDENLY, A PIERCING SOUND fills the room...

... and the Homelander's head EXPLODES all over the place.

From all around, the thump of bodies hitting the ground.

WIDE ON THE BAY:

The Seven are dead, headless bodies of the so-called greatest heroes in the world sprawled where they fell. Black Noir.

The Deep. Beastie. Queen Maeve. The Homelander, the most powerful being in the world. Dead.

Next to Hughie, the headless torso of the A-Train.

And across the deck, Annie...

Alive. She looks at the button, not understanding.

Hughie opens his eyes, and opens his hand.

In it is a DRUG CAPSULE. The one he took out of the gun before throwing it to Frenchman.

Hughie and Annie, completely still, look only at each other.

EXT. NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY - SAME

The President gives an impassioned speech about eduction.

PRESIDENT CLEVELAND
... nothing is more important to our future nation. We cannot be short-sighted. We will not deprive our children of...

Suddenly, he stops. A strange pause. He's caught sight of something above. Seeing his concern, many in the crowd turn, looking with him to see--

ACROSS THE STREET, a woman leans out of a fifth story window, flashing her breasts, screaming for the President.

As the secret service scrambles to deal with her, the President turns back to the crowd. He smiles.

PRESIDENT CLEVELAND
I love New York.

INT. WAREHOUSE - SAME

A metallic CLANKING. The large hangar door at one end of the warehouse rolls up.

The rabid ARMY OF VILLAINS whoop it up as daylight floods the warehouse. One of them lets out a battle cry.

SUPER VILLAIN
Let's fuck some shit UP!

Then he sees what is outside the door. It's Rayner, backed by just a couple FBI guys. The villains look flabbergasted.

SUPER VILLAIN
Who the fuck are you, twat?

Rayner smiles. She holds up a CYLINDRICAL TRIGGER DEVICE... much like the one Butcher has.

RAYNER
Guess what this does?

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAYS LATER

The battered Boys, all bandaged and badly injured, have gathered in the Female's room. She is barely conscious, seems to have gotten the worst of all of them.

We watch over their shoulders as, ON THE TELEVISION, the Vice President goes down in metaphorical flames.

VICE PRESIDENT BASS
For this reason, effective immediately, I will resign the office of the Vice Presidency...

As he continues, the news ticker scrolls below: "...Vice President photographed in "blackface" at Christmas party..."

BUTCHER
Nice angle. Tough to explain that one to the base.

HUGHIE
And what about Vought?

BUTCHER
What about 'em?

MOTHER'S MILK
Vought didn't do anything. An independently run subsidiary of theirs did. A rogue executive...

BUTCHER
They have no connection to it whatsoever.

FRENCHMAN
But, in the reality, they do.

BUTCHER
He gets it, Frenchy.

HUGHIE
Jesus Christ...

BUTCHER
May seem like it sometimes, but we are not always dealing with idiots.

As they start to leave, a hand grabs Hughie's arm. It's the Female's. From the Boys' reactions, this is a big deal.

FRENCHMAN
This... is new.

EXT. TEK MANOR - LATER

Butcher and Hughie walk across the expansive lawn behind the Tek Manor. Tek Knight, head wrapped in a bandage, sits in an old-fashioned wooden wheelchair, greeting them with a smile.

TEK KNIGHT
It was just a brain tumor!

He laughs, throwing his hands up.

TEK KNIGHT
A brain tumor!!

HUGHIE
Congratulations?

TEK KNIGHT
You have no idea. I was going insane.

A tremendously hot NURSE puts some pills on a side table. Tek Knight lowers his voice.

TEK KNIGHT
I mean, the things I wanted to... The things I *did*.

Standing beside the Tek Knight, his faithful butler Thomas shifts uncomfortably.

BUTCHER
No need to rehash, mate.

THOMAS
Here, here.

TEK KNIGHT
Well, I'm back. Better than ever.

The NURSE bends over him, adjusting his blankets. A tense pause. Finally, she leaves, and the Tek Knight smiles.

He points to his crotch. Nothing brewing.

TEK KNIGHT
Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Butcher produces something from his coat and tosses it to the Tek Knight-- it's the TRIGGER BUTTON.

BUTCHER
Worked like a charm. We owe you one.

Hughie looks to the Tek Knight, incredulous.

HUGHIE
You made that for us?

TEK KNIGHT
It didn't build itself.
(to Butcher)
And if it worked... we're even.

As Hughie and Butcher walk away... the roaring sound of a high-tech motorcycle. LADDIO, the formerly imprisoned boy wonder, leaps off and enthusiastically embraces Tek Knight.

TEK KNIGHT
Laddio. Thank god.

Butcher and Hughie make their way back up the sprawling lawn.

HUGHIE
Any of this got you thinking?

BUTCHER
'bout what?

HUGHIE
Some of them supes might actually be heroes.

BUTCHER
And who would you be talkin' about?

HUGHIE
She pressed that button thinking she was dosed.

BUTCHER
Yep.

HUGHIE
But you would've taken her out.

BUTCHER
No question.

The answer doesn't seem to suit Hughie. He looks at Butcher for a long moment.

BUTCHER
If you're looking for an apology...

HUGHIE
Yeah, I know.

Hughie produces a folded-up newspaper. "Heroes to the End: Seven Drag NucleaTron into Black Hole, Save Manhattan."

HUGHIE
Why do they go out as heroes? Why can't we tell the truth?

BUTCHER
All that matters right now is that they're gone. We don't need to be the people who took away Santa Claus. So they get to tell their story, and we get to stay viable.

HUGHIE
It's messed up.

BUTCHER
It's a living.
(pause)
But I will enjoy *this* funeral.

He shakes Hughie's hand.

BUTCHER
Back to Glasgow, then?

HUGHIE
Nah. This outfit needs some checks and balances. I'll see you tomorrow.

BUTCHER
Good man.

Hughie turns to leave.

BUTCHER
Thank her for me.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - LATE AFTERNOON

Hughie limps through the park, obviously still in pain. But he's pushing through. In fact, he's hurrying. UP AHEAD, we see why--

Annie. She stands in front of their bench waiting for him. Her smile is as bright as anything we've seen.

HUGHIE
Annie...

ANNIE
Wee Hughie.

They fall into each other. Behind then, the blazing orange sun dips behind the Manhattan skyline.

INT. WAREHOUSE - SAME

A real inferno rages inside Vought's warehouse, consuming the building, the dead executives inside, the bodies of the villains. Amidst the wreckage, close on the storyboards.

We watch as the one depicting the death of Starlight burns.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE GODOLKIN ACADEMY - DAY

Less of a school and more of a mansion, it's a magnificent country estate, set back on a vast expanse of green.

MAN (O.S.)
Very impressive, Mr. Godolkin.

INT. GODOLKIN ACADEMY

MR. GODOLKIN, a thin, noble-looking man with slicked-back hair and an impeccably cut pinstripe suit, escorts an UNSEEN MAN through the halls of the manor.

MR. GODOLKIN
We do our best. Molding young minds is my passion. I can think of no greater calling in life.

MAN (O.S.)
Well, I hope our support has been helpful.

MR. GODOLKIN
Immeasurably. The new gym is quite a stunner.

Two YOUNG BOYS dart past, almost colliding with them.

MR. GODOLKIN
Careful, boys...

MAN (O.S.)
And when do you think they'll be ready?

MR. GODOLKIN
The younger ones have a ways to go, of course. But my class of seniors graduates at the end of the month. And I dare say... they're spectacular.

MAN (O.S.)
Mmm. Have you given them a name?

MR. GODOLKIN
Well, you have whole departments for that. But in the absence of anything else, I've been calling them...

Godolkin stops in front of a large picture window, through which a costumed group of YOUNG ADULTS can be seen PRACTICING VARIOUS SUPERPOWERS out on the lawn.

MR. GODOLKIN
...the G-Men.

Godolkin looks to his companion-- we see now that it's the same VOUGHT REP who was in charge of the late, great Seven.

VOUGHT REP
Perfect.

He smiles.

VOUGHT REP
We can sell that.

CUT TO BLACK.